





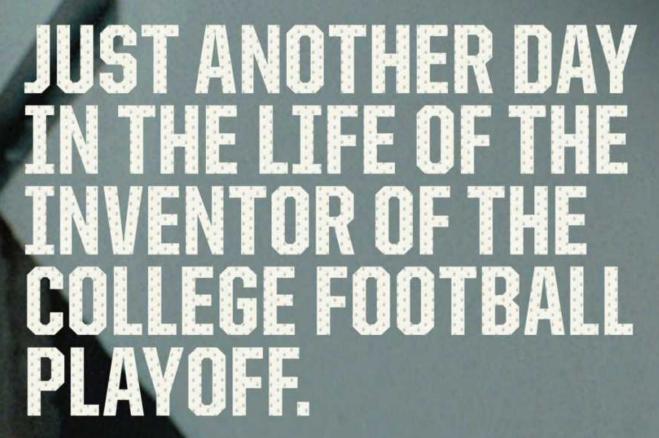


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## IDEAS OF THE YEAR

### 37 IDEAS OF THE YEAR

12.21.15

One idea can uplift the world—or upend it. We examine what changed the game in 2015.

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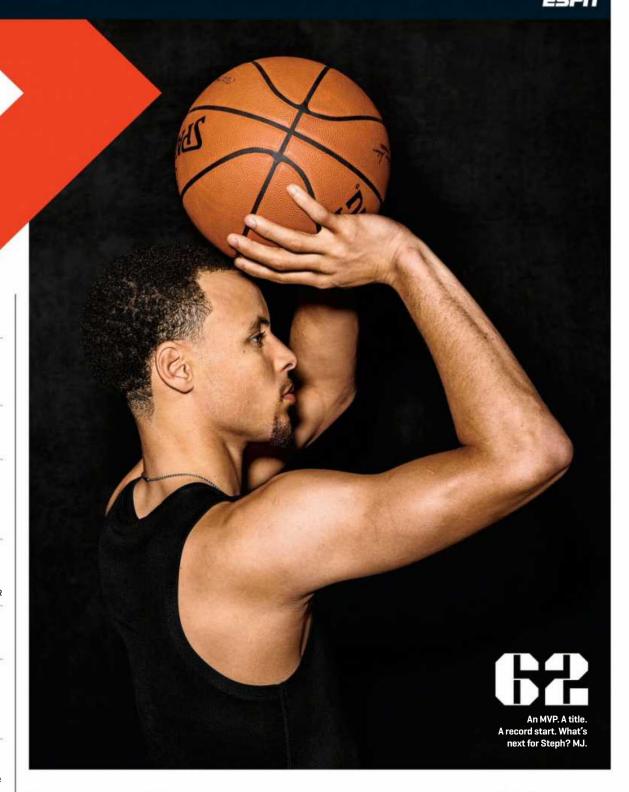
What it looks like when two regular dudes become the faces of a national debate. BY MINA KIMES

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Ronda Rousey, photographed in 2014 at the Glendale Fighting Club.

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As Missouri taught us, athletes now have power—and the ball is in their court. BY HOWARD BRYANT

## BEHIND THE PAGES



## Tanking to Win

Senior writer Sam Alipour on spa day with Steph Curry: "I met Steph, his wife, Ayesha, and Harrison Barnes on Thanksgiving eve in San Francisco's Reboot Float Spa. SportsCenter was shooting a story about the Warriors' use of sensory-deprivation sessions. I'm from the area, and Reboot's owner is a buddy, so the evening doubled as a Friendsgiving, with our pals trickling in to chat up the local heroes. Far from being too cool to kick it, Steph stuck around long after we wrapped and indulged his fans with grace and humor—even while fielding my little brother's joke about becoming his agent. I wasn't surprised: Steph's the kind of MVP who quotes Disney movies and texts smiley faces in reference to his new favorite toilet. He's clearly relaxed." MORE ON PAGE 62

The NBA champ and MVP stays on point by floating in a sensory-deprivation tank.

## Senior writer Ramona Shelburne on the intensity of Ronda Rousey



"The interview Ronda and I did the week after her loss was so deep and emotional that I needed to walk around to process it before I drove home. She lives about five minutes from

Venice Beach, so I headed there. The city actually has two murals of her, and I noticed three teenage girls busking in front of one. I asked if they knew who Ronda was. They lit up and said they loved her. I asked if any song reminded them of her. They talked for a bit, then looked up the lyrics to Rachel Platten's 'Fight Song.' It was the perfect theme for what I was about to write." MORE ON PAGE 38

## Illustrator Rafa Alvarez on his connection to DeAndre Jordan



"I always develop some sort of empathy with the people I draw. In this case, the events that led to DeAndre's decision to stay with the Clippers made me think about our ultimate motivations: Do we

just want to give our best at what we do, or do we need to be praised? As an artist—and a frustrated basketball player—I could relate. I also couldn't help wondering if DeAndre and the others would like their illustrated selves. I frequently use myself as a model, and being rather skinny, I had to spend an extra afternoon just drawing bigger muscles on all of them." MORE ON PAGE 74

## Senior writer Wright Thompson on his time in Paris after the attacks



"Before taking off for Paris, less than 48 hours after the terrorist attacks and not sure what I'd find in a city I love, I made a reservation at my favorite restaurant. Chez D'Eux is a neighborhood spot

behind the Champs de Mars, with red checkerboard tablecloths, a smiling fat waiter and the finest cassoulet in the world. I reported my story, surrounded by grief, and on my last night, I headed to dinner. The fat waiter and the bottle of burgundy and a thick cassoulet made me think that the city was stronger than those who tried to destroy it, that somehow Paris had endured." MORE ON PAGE 92

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## Who's the Top NHL Rookie Now?

ESPN Insider Corey Pronman lists his top four candidates for the Calder Trophy (until Connor McDavid returns from a broken collarbone).

## **Artemi Panarin**

### LW | CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS

Panarin, an elusive skater with dynamic puck skills and hockey sense, has consistently produced, helping fill a void in the Blackhawks' lineup created by the summer departures of Brandon Saad and Patrick Sharp. Playing more than 19 minutes per game and skating opposite Patrick Kane, the 24-year-old Russian leads rookies in scoring [23 points] and would arguably be the top rookie even if McDavid were healthy.

## **Jack Eichel**

### C | BUFFALO SABRES

Eichel has eight goals (tied for third among rookies), but his overall production (0.5 points per game, tied for 12th among rookies) hasn't met the hype surrounding the second overall pick. Still, the scouts like the 19-year-old's fundamentals, and his shots-per-game rate puts him at the same level of the best under-20 players of the past 10 seasons. The points will surely roll in as the bounces start to go his way.

## **Colton Parayko**

### D | ST. LOUIS BLUES

Parayko, 22, emerged from obscurity this season to face some of the Blues' best opponents. Advanced analytics site Behind the Net ranks him second among the team's defensemen in quality of competition faced at even strength. Big men who can skate, shoot and move the puck are rare. His defense can improve, but Parayko plays at such a high level that it won't be long until he's an all-situations defenseman.

## **Dylan Larkin**

### C | DETROIT RED WINGS

Just 19 years old, Larkin tops all rookies in goals (10) and is tied for the overall league lead in plus-minus (+14). His speed is incredible, while his reads and reactions show he has adjusted to the NHL pace after just one season at Michigan. Larkin has played the second-most evenstrength minutes among the team's forwards, behind Henrik Zetterberg, and is the clear leader of Detroit's youth movement.

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## THE TRUTH



BY Howard Bryant



## Power Surge In 2015, athletes changed the game by flexing their political muscles. In 2016, a true revolution awaits—if they choose to push for it.

hen the year 2013 drew to a close, it did so with the expectation of change and responsibility. Champions were crowned, but the year was distinctive because Mike Rice was fired as Rutgers men's basketball coach for humiliating his players, because Jason Collins came out as gay and because Richie Incognito was suspended from the Miami Dolphins for his mistreatment of teammate Jonathan Martin.

In each case, the message was clear: The decades of boys being boys, of the male athletic language of muscle and misogyny, would no longer be the accepted cultural norm. Neither coaches nor players could use derogatory terms for women (and their anatomies) as metaphors for weakness—at least not so publicly and so brazenly. Then in 2014, Derrick Gordon and Michael Sam came out. In an uncloseted world, teammates had to think twice before speaking in slur. Even among 300-pound tough guys, bullying was once shrugged off as a province of the weak, but, like concussions, it became a serious word about a serious workplace issue. Jobs and careers were at stake. Men needed to find another language because the old one appeared to be dead.

This year and next will be connected by another step in shattering the old orthodoxy: athletes using their power to challenge the system. In 2014, NBA players were prepared to boycott games unless new commissioner Adam Silver acted decisively on Donald Sterling. In 2015, the Missouri football team put its enormous clout behind a student movement that toppled a university system president and a university chancellor.

The players, should it be a mission they choose to accept, are on the verge of revolution. Only to the deniers or the naive is each step an isolated incident, whether the conversation is Ed O'Bannon suing the NCAA, unionization at Northwestern, players forcing an owner's ouster or Missouri football threatening a boycott if student demands are not met. Combined with the resurrection of protest as a weapon on American streets, times are changing. The money in sports is enormous, and the systemic issues of inequity remain heinous: scholarships that ostensibly provide educational compensation in lieu of a paycheck; coaches leaving for more money while most players must sit out a year after transferring. But the generational belief that an unfair system cannot be changed is not shared by students who slept in tents until they received some say.

There is, however, one important caveat: Athletes do not seem particularly interested in the revolution that sits at their fingertips. Like most Americans, players don't want revolution nearly as much as they want a better seat at the table, which explains why the power of their collective vocal cords has been used for issues with short-term goals and not for the collective reinvention of a system.

The stakes are higher for the African-American basketball and football players, who must navigate a different world socially in a time of disastrously failed integration and navigate in an industry in which post-playing opportunities in the game are severely limited or virtually nonexistent. Still, player power is greater today than it was when the Black 14 were removed from the University of Wyoming football team in 1969 for a proposed protest in a game against BYU, in solidarity with a student protest of the LDS Church's racist practices. Additionally, the times are different, as the question of player inequity receives a more sympathetic ear from a public far less fooled by the hoax of "amateurism" in a billion-dollar sports world.

Fueled by the spirit of protest, from Occupy to concussion suits to Black Lives Matter, the year 2015 has revealed that the power of the player and the attitude of the times are coalescing, and the near shutdown at Missouri might be eclipsed by a larger, national action. Maybe players will one day organize and shut down the entire system, choosing not to play in the Final Four or the College Football Playoff, the two most lucrative events college sports offers. Or maybe not.

What is clear is that a dormant voice awoke this year with enormous implications. Of all the sports stories of the year, Missouri was the most powerful. The message was sent: It is the players who will decide if yesterday is no longer today.

12 ESPN 12.21.2015 ILLUSTRATION BY MARK SMITH

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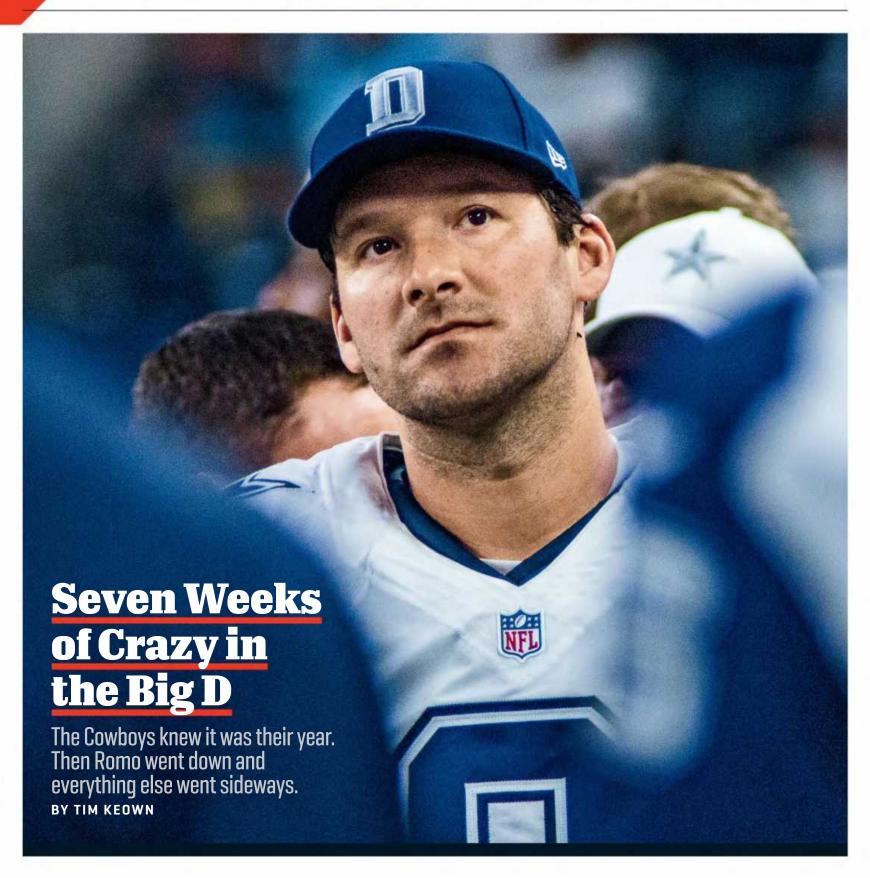








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## : FORWARD



Romo's return was supposed to fix Dallas. The solution lasted one game.

So the idea was to check in on the Dallas Cowboys, see how they're doing, hang out a little bit. There are some interesting personalities in that locker room, which raised a few questions back in October: How's everything going to work out with Greg Hardy? How's Jason Garrett holding the seams together without Tony Romo and Dez Bryant? What's Jerry Jones thinking about the team he declared a Super Bowl contender? There might be some fodder there for a good football story, a tale of determination in the face of adversity or something along those lines. You never know, the thinking went, something interesting might happen.

## LISTENING TO GARRETT RESPOND TO A QUESTION ABOUT DEZ'S MONKEY, I WONDER, WHAT'S NEXT?

More than a month later, after seven straight losses, two backup quarterbacks, one collarbone broken twice, a conga line of running backs, a sideline eruption, more Twitter than previously thought possible, one AWOL starter and a brief PETA incursion, only one question remains: Where do you start?

Maybe you start on the early evening of Oct. 25, near the sideline of MetLife Stadium in New Jersey, in the fourth quarter of a loss to the Giants, with Hardy slapping the clipboard of special-teams coach Rich Bisaccia and then raging along the sideline while Bryant tries to calm him. Or maybe an hour or so later, when Hardy stands at his locker stall and interrupts eight straight questions with "No comment; next question," his words like shoes in a dryer.

The Cowboys, in the delicate phrasing of one player, are a team of "unique egos," on the field and in the front office. Over the course of more than a month, I witness many incidents that validate the description. I can tell you that Bryant favors walking through the team's Valley Ranch practice facility carrying a pill-shaped speaker, music thumping. He is usually covered in more layers of clothing than the weather would deem necessary, and he is usually smiling. It appears he derives pleasure from the fact that everyone

tracks his whereabouts by the music, as if listening for an approaching siren.

I witness the Cowboys sign and release running backs like a novice gambler convinced he'll draw a straight on the river. I stand at the locker of a starting offensive lineman and listen to him say he'd just learned Christine Michael's name that day, six weeks after the running back known as C-Mike had been traded to Dallas from Seattle, and four days before he would play his third game with the team.

Along with everyone else, I try to square the Cowboys' contradictions when it comes to Greg Hardy. He was signed to a one-year, \$11.3 million deal despite a 2014 conviction for domestic violence stemming from an incident involving his ex-girlfriend. (The conviction was later dismissed, and his record was expunged.) He is tolerated despite the sideline tantrum in New Jersey and missing or arriving late for several meetings. Five days before the Cowboys play the Dolphins, two marginal players—corner Corey White and C-Mike—are released, partly because of substandard performance, partly maybe because they don't wear suits on the flight to Tampa.

I come to know the many aftereffects of the moment Romo walked off the field Sept. 20 saying "It's broken" after being hit by Eagles linebacker Jordan Hicks. I watch that moment metastasize, week after week, until Romo's absence becomes a bigger presence than any actual human on the field. Sure, quarterbacking has become fetishized in the NFL, but the Cowboys have been acolytes longer than most. Meredith, Staubach, Aikman, Romo—hell, even Clint Longley owns a chapter in their mythology. So it only stands to reason that every deficiency through seven straight losses is attributed to life without Romo. Offense, defense, playcalling, special teams—doesn't matter. His void fills every void.

By Week 7, when backup Brandon Weeden and his three straight losses are shoved aside in favor of newly acquired Matt Cassel, Romo's absence is brought up so much it feels like an airborne narcotic, something being pumped through the ventilation ducts. They lost by failing to convert a third down here or hit a wide-open receiver there, and none of it would have happened if Romo were playing.

Eventually, I call a source close to the team to see whether I am missing something. Even taking into account the vast talent difference between Romo and Weeden/Cassel, is it possible for one player to leave such a chasm? "There were plenty of cracks in this team's foundation that would have led to struggles with or without Tony Romo," the source says. "But Romo overtook everything."

Without Romo, the Cowboys bring back the type of extremely conservative playcalling that died in the late 1970s. I watch offensive linemen throw their bodies around the field, pushing forward to open holes for the running backs, taking enormous punishment from enormous, angry men to protect their quarterback—only to see it lost in Sisyphean fashion because of a bad interception or an avoidable sack or a muffed punt. I stand next to rookie guard La'el Collins in New Jersey and watch him wince as he peels the tape from his wrist, saying, "Just two or three more plays, man, and we win all these games."

I hear every mathematical permutation of the question, "Do you think you can win a game before Romo gets back?" And I hear every mathematical permutation of the answer except for the one that proves to be correct: no.

**DAY AFTER DAY,** I sit in mesmerized admiration while listening to coach Jason Garrett's soothing, almost womblike predictability as he answers questions with innocuous and grammatically precise sentences. He is never dismissive, even when he is dismissing. There is always a smile,

## 🖁 FORWARD

even when there is an edge. His words, delivered in a voice that betrays no place of origin, float out of his mouth and die the moment they hit the air. Nothing is ever definitive; no specifics are ever offered. Asked heading into Week 9 about whether Cassel's starting spot is secure until Romo's return, Garrett replies, "I'd prefer not to take a global view on that."

(His hair, the color of an autumn maple, is always perfect, and I imagine him checking each strand before he leaves the house. Also: It never seems to grow. Over those weeks, as I sit through his daily news conferences, listening to his words dissolve, my thoughts stray to the improbability of his hair. Does it move? Is it an artificial-turf version of human hair? Amid the empty reports of ankle injuries and game plans and opponents' tendencies, Garrett's hair becomes something of an obsession.)

Garrett is a man of impressive stability and personal discipline—his players speak of a man whose passion fills the room. "He's got a great way of keeping guys together and bonding a team," linebacker Sean Lee says. Two days before his team plays in Miami, seven games down but with Romo's return exactly 48 hours away, Garrett sits in his office with his feet on his desk, his mood light. He speaks of his 85-year-old father, Jim, a longtime coach and Cowboys scout who urges his children to appreciate "the inherent value of the experience." When Jason and his siblings went off to college, Jim and Jane Garrett made sure to tell them, "You go to college to get an education, not a job." If it's consistency you want, Jim's your guy: He went for a run every day for 30 years. "I kid you not on this," Jason says. "For 30 straight years, he ran every day. When I say every single day, I mean every ... single ... day. Sick, broken ribs, bad weather, didn't matter.

"And so I certainly try to be consistent. One of the things we all have to be careful about when we deal with the press in 2015 and you're playing or coaching for the Dallas Cowboys is getting off track. ... Every decision I make and we make is in the best interest of the Dallas Cowboys, so really everything we say publicly and privately should follow that. My players get used to me saying this all the time: How matters. How you conduct yourself every day, how we approach every day, how we play—all that stuff matters. The result matters, but how is really important."

There is a sign on a wall between the team's practice field and the locker room: It is a privilege, and not a right, to coach and play for the dallas cowboys. The message carries a





After being sacked by Jordan Hicks in Week 2, "I felt it," Romo said of his broken collarbone. Ten weeks later, a repeat against the Panthers.

hint of warning—"Don't forget your suit" is at least implied—and every time I see those commas, I assume Garrett had something to do with the grammatical precision.

The Cowboys really do hold themselves apart, as if they're a 53-man metaphor for America's hopes and dreams. The pregame ritual at AT&T Stadium is so excessive it veers toward parody: The World Famous Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders (salary: reportedly \$150 per game) bounce from a tunnel at the 50-yard line to form a giant V, an army of young men wearing cowboy costumes sprint through the V and fan out in formation carrying enormous Cowboys flags that spew fireworks from their poles. Only then, and precisely then, does Garrett appear to lead his gladiators through the tunnel and onto the field.

"America's Team" sounds quaint now. After 20 years without a Super Bowl, it sounds more like the answer to a trivia question than a legitimate description. Yet Garrett talks about "maintaining the right standard" so often that he admits it's nearly reflexive. The idea embodies all the grand notions, suggesting that playing or coaching for the Cowboys imbues an individual with an athletic and civic responsibility not required of the Bills or Bucs. But all this self-mythologizing doesn't seem to reflect reality. The standard, vis-à-vis the Hardy conundrum, appears to have a sliding scale, based on ability, seemingly countervailing all definitions of the word "standard."

"We're not going to be able to control 63 players with every decision they make," Garrett says, "but we do have a standard and an expectation." Or maybe it's an impossible job. Over the course of the seven-game losing streak, it's hard to count the number of times Garrett is forced to address an issue that arises on Twitter. "I'm not on



## CONVERSATIONS ABOUT NOTHING IN PARTICULAR



Sometimes, the little things last the longest.







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Twitter," he says. "I've literally never looked at it." But there is Cole Beasley's wife lashing out at fans after he muffed a punt late in the Week 7 loss to the Giants. There is Romo, leading up to his return against the Dolphins, tweeting a clip from the movie *Major League* that shows Tom Berenger saying, "There's only one thing left to do ... win the whole f---ing thing," which is treated with the seriousness of a declaration of war. "Well, yeah, that's what we've got to do," Jason Witten says.

Far more seriously, five days after Deadspin releases photos of Hardy's bruised and battered ex-girlfriend, the defensive end changes his Twitter bio to include the words "innocent until proven guilty." This decision dominates the news cycle for two days, prompting Hardy to miss meetings before the Week 10 loss to Tampa Bay and forcing Garrett to have his fourth behavior-related meeting with Hardy.

The photos heap backlash upon backlash. U.S. Congressman Michael Burgess questions why Hardy is still playing in a league that professes a new understanding of the seriousness of domestic violence. "The Dallas Cowboys pride themselves on being 'America's Team,'" Burgess writes in a statement, "and they have an obligation to their fans, players and families to conduct themselves with the highest professional integrity."

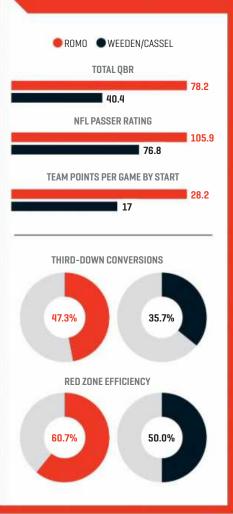
Garrett, no doubt sensing the slipperiness of this particular slope, chooses his words even more carefully than usual. "I do think we anticipated a reaction to signing him," he says, "and we probably anticipated a reaction when other information came out about it. But again, the calculation was, can we create the right environment for him to become the best version of himself? And I've certainly seen strides. Like other guys, you have to continue to call him on things when he doesn't do things the right way, maintain that standard for how we conduct ourselves on and off the field."

I ask linebacker Rolando McClain, who started the season on a four-game suspension for violating the league's substance abuse policy, what he thinks of the locker room dynamic, and he says, "It's like getting stuck in your room with your brother. Sometimes you want to beat the crap out of him. Other times you're just happy as ever that he's right there."

After spending time around people such as Witten and Tyron Smith and Darren McFadden and Byron Jones and Sean Lee, it seems entirely conceivable that Garrett is correct when he says, "We've got 99 percent of our guys doing the right things 100 percent of the time, or maybe it's

## THE WAY, WAY BACKUPS

Tony Romo lost one game last season to a broken back and eight [and counting] this year to a broken collarbone. The 2014-15 numbers show he's pretty irreplaceable.



Stats through Week 12.

100 percent of the guys doing the right things 99 percent of the time." But it is also unquestionably true that when that 1 percent—from whichever equation—acts up, the repercussions are like a boulder dropped in a puddle.

**GARRETT LOVES TO** talk about a virtual-reality system the Cowboys use to help their backup quarterbacks get virtual reps during seven-onseven drills. As a former longtime backup quarterback himself, he knows the difficulty of trying to prepare while standing on the practice field with little to do. They put on a headset that allows them to see and hear the play, as if they were the ones taking the snap and reading the coverage. It sounds really cool, like one of those inventions that figures to advance professional sports while

accelerating their obsolescence. Anyway, that's not the part Garrett loves to talk about.

When the Cowboys played a preseason game in San Francisco in August, Garrett visited the STRIVR Labs company headquarters in Palo Alto, near Stanford. "So you're standing there on what you think is like a two-by-four, and the floor separates," he says. "Suddenly you're 15 stories up on a skyscraper, looking straight down, and then the floor drops again and now you're 40 stories up. You know that you're in this room. You know that your feet are on solid ground, but you almost get frozen by it. There was another one where you're standing in a room and all of a sudden you see all these gremlins attacking you. You know it's not happening, you're telling yourself you're in a room in a building, but you start moving, trying to avoid these gremlins. It's really wild."

After getting his guts ripped out by late-game losses for weeks on end, Garrett is sitting here talking about virtual gremlins attacking him from all angles. He's talking about the feeling you get in the pit of your stomach when your brain is telling you that the things you hold dearest in life—consistency, the stability of the ground beneath your feet—are illusions. As metaphors go, it doesn't get much richer.

"I don't know how you want to use that knowledge," Garrett says. "But ..."

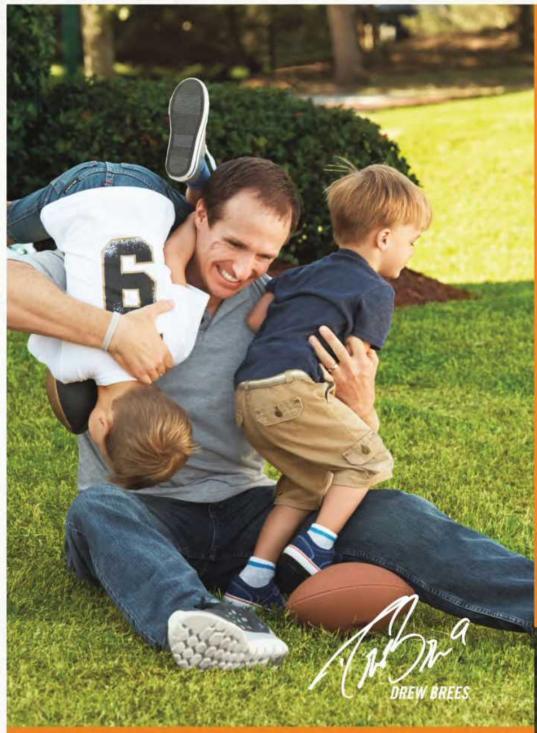
He says nothing more. He delivers a wry smile you can take any way you'd like. His eyes say: You're on your own here.

**THE COWBOYS OPEN** their locker room to the media for 45 minutes every afternoon. It's a generous allotment, probably too generous when you consider the impossibility of finding more than one significant player willing to talk. When someone like Witten or Lee or McFadden makes an appearance at his locker, the rush of reporters and camera folks is like iron filings to a magnet.

On my first day in Dallas, I see starting running back Joseph Randle sitting at his locker by himself. This seems like a rare opportunity, so I introduce myself.

"When do I get to be on the cover of the magazine?" he asks.

At this point in the season, Randle has 291 yards rushing in five games. He's one week from losing his starting job to McFadden. Not to be dismissive, but I wait an extra beat or two for a laugh that never comes. And then I remember that Randle was arrested for shoplifting underwear and cologne from a Dallas department store a year ago and managed to parlay it into an



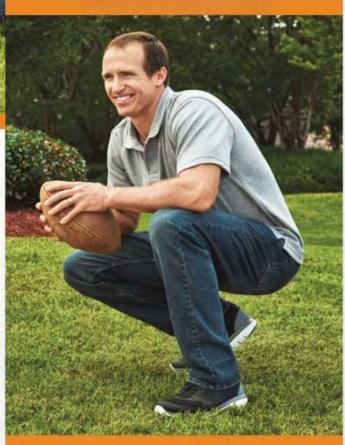
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Most games were close. One was a blowout. The only real takeaway? Seven straight losses.











endorsement deal with an underwear company. Maybe it's best not to underestimate him.

"Well, if you tell me a good enough story," I say. He turns to his locker and grabs a pair of shoes. "Is this like a real interview?" he asks.

"I thought you wanted to be on the cover."

"I already talked this week," he says, turning back to his locker. "Get me next week."

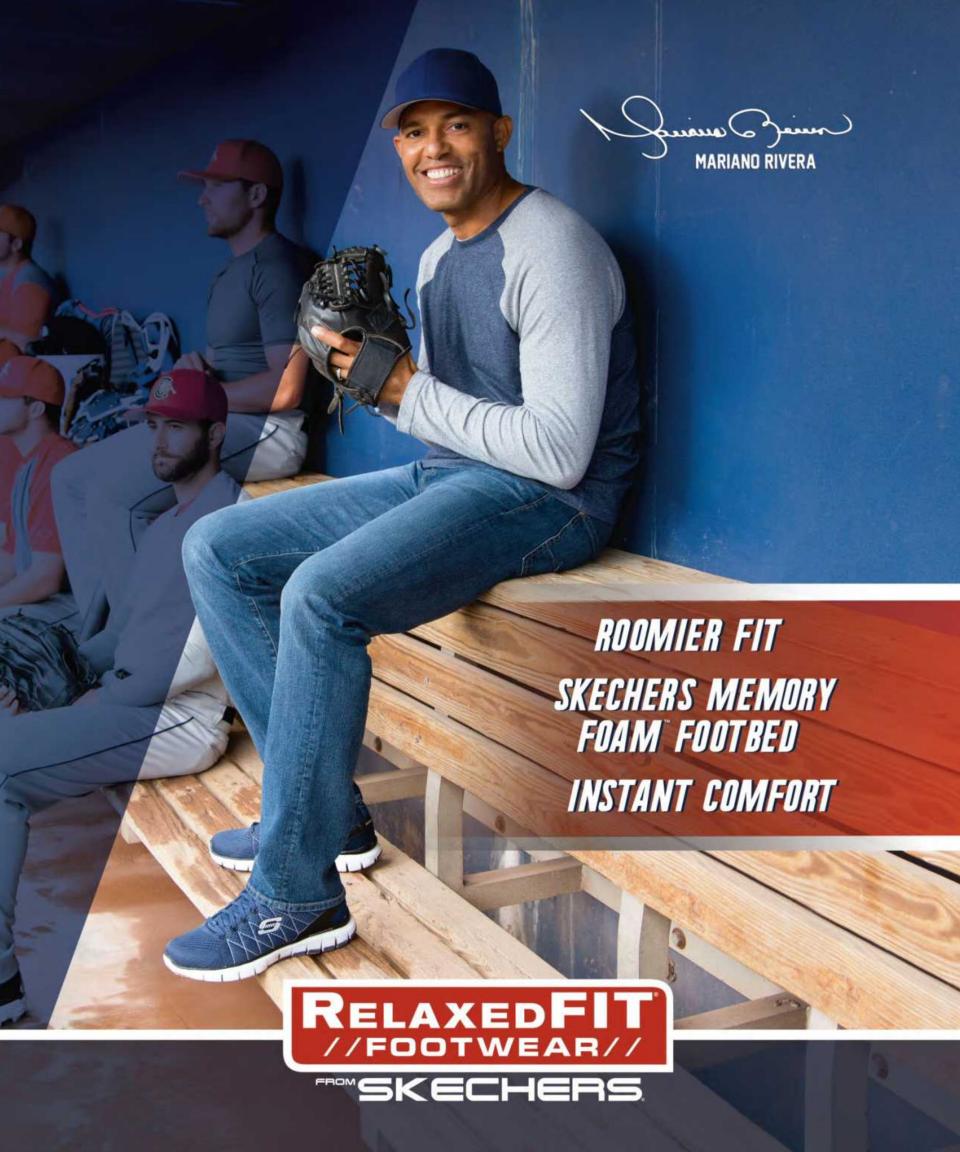
Against the Giants, Randle carries the ball twice and leaves the game with an injury of questionable severity. By Wednesday, apparently upset by his demotion, he has missed a treatment session. The Cowboys release him the next Tuesday, one week before the NFL announces a four-game suspension because of domestic violence allegations involving his ex-girlfriend in Kansas and about two weeks before Randle is arrested after causing a disturbance in a Kansas casino.

ICAN SAY this about Jerry Jones: He's accessible. After every game, he stands outside the Cowboys' locker room and answers questions for as long as anybody is willing to ask them. He's heavy on the stream of consciousness, and a PR person is usually within earshot, strolling like a pit boss. In New Jersey, after the Cowboys' 27-20 loss, there is an almost visceral recoil when Jones defends—no, praises and defends—Hardy for whacking the coach's clipboard inside a huddle that didn't concern him and then raging around the sideline like a balloon getting relieved of its helium.

"He's, of course, one of the real leaders on this team," Jones says of Hardy. "And he earns it with respect from all of his teammates, and that's the kind of thing that inspires a football team."

There is something about this postgame scene that makes it feel as if the floor is no longer under the Cowboys' feet. It was Cassel's first start after Weeden went 0–3, and the Cowboys seemed to feel they were on to something. An inspiring fourth-quarter touchdown drive by Cassel raised hopes, until it was followed by a 100-yard kickoff return by former Cowboy Dwayne Harris—the catalyst for Hardy's anger. It was like a hornet was released into a crowded room; anything seemed possible.

But afterward, Jones answers questions with an almost tranquilized equanimity. Whatever torture resides inside him, it is absent. He expected so much after last year's 12–4 season and wild-card win over Detroit; he glides through life as if it's his



## : FORWARD

God-given right to finish on top, yet here he is sounding as if he's resigned to his fate. Without prompting, he mentions his first year as owner, the 1–15 disaster in 1989 that followed the unpopular firing of Tom Landry. "Well," he says. "Twenty-eight months later, we were winning the Super Bowl."

Maybe it's all a gamble: drilling a hole in the ground, firing an icon, winging it at backup QB, buying a stake in DraftKings. "I've said this two or three times, this is the life we chose," Jones says. This is a 73-year-old man who has chosen to be the general manager of his own football team despite indications that others might be more qualified for the job. This is a man who is lionized as a titan of industry, a man worth \$5 billion and climbing, a man who is at the moment wearing a suit that costs as much as a midsize SUV. Sorry, but "the life we chose" falls a bit flat.

Perhaps sensing this, Jones changes course. "I had a conversation with another owner about times like this," he says, and here he lapses into Jerry-the-storyteller mode. It is undeniably charming, the way he trains those hypertrophic eyes on you, cocks his smile and pauses at all the right times. "Well, this owner, he said to me, 'I have some advice: Drink.'"

MATT CASSEL IS the movie version of a quarter-back, the kind of guy described as a leader by looks alone. He's tall, his gaze is steely, his jawline is formidable and his posture leads by example. I don't know whether I've ever met a more polite athlete. After losing to the Seahawks, he apologizes to the media for using the word "damn" in an interview.

He is the backup's backup, regarded as the most accomplished NFL quarterback never to have started a game in college. Still, his body of work shows nothing more than an uncanny ability to be overestimated, an attribute that can be traced to his main professional achievement, going 10–5 as Tom Brady's replacement in New England in 2008. Over the ensuing years, as Cassel has bounced from the Patriots to the Chiefs to the Vikings to the Bills to the Cowboys, his work in New England has become one more reason Bill Belichick is lauded as Hoodie Jesus.

"I learned a long time ago," Cassel says, "that you can't read or see what's going on outside. It takes away from what's going on inside the building and what the coaches are trying to achieve. There are times when the criticism is something you deserve as a quarterback, and there are times when the people doing the criticizing don't know what they're talking about."

"WELL, THIS OWNER SAID TO ME, THAVE SOME ADVICE: DRINK."

JERRY JONES, OWNER OF THE COWBOYS

He is talking after he failed to lead the Cowboys to a touchdown in a 13-12 loss to the Seahawks. Needing a field goal on the last drive, he was sacked on a play that cried out for him to throw the ball away. A little more than two hours later, on national TV, during halftime of Packers-Broncos, against the video backdrop of Cassel being sacked by Bruce Irvin, former All-Pro safety Rodney Harrison says, "He looked like he never played quarterback before."

**INSIDE A PARTY** tent on a construction site in Frisco, one of the endless suburbs north of Dallas where nothing is more than an hour old, stucco is king and luxury car dealerships have replaced cattle ranches, Jerry Jones is in the middle of a group of men who—like him—are accustomed to standing around like statuary while others approach with smiles and extended hands.

After five straight losses and the roiling turmoil of the roster he concocted, the old speculator is here to spike another shovel into another piece of earth. This is nothing new: He bet on oil and won, on Romo/Hardy '15 and lost, and now he's betting on Frisco with the same public-money safety net he found to his liking when he built AT&T Stadium in Arlington. The announcement he is here to make is neither surprising nor especially newsworthy: Omni Hotels has released the plans for the hotel it is building as part of the Ford Center at the Star, the Cowboys' 91-acre, \$2 billion practice facility/retail complex scheduled to open next year. In typically understated fashion, the Star is termed "the Dallas Cowboys World Headquarters." There will be a city-owned 12,000-seat stadium to be shared with local high schools, two practice fields, restaurants, a bar, team offices and a high-end hotel.

Former quarterback and current Cowboys broadcaster Babe Laufenberg serves as the master of ceremonies. He notes the jackhammering and backup-beeping and crane-lifting going on in the background and says, "We're going to fight through the noise." Laufenberg launches into a story about Jerry from the construction days at Cowboys Stadium, when he was attempting to interview Jones for a live radio spot and fought through similar construction noise. "Can we get them to hold off for 10 minutes 'til we're finished?" Laufenberg asked. Jones looked at him-probably with that same half-smile, half-wince he's giving Laufenberg at this precise moment—and said, "Babe, you see those people out there? They're costing me \$1 million a day. We're going to fight through the noise."

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## 🖁 FORWARD

There are more knowing nods than laughs, which tells you what kind of crowd this is. Jones stands and walks to the microphone. He thanks all the appropriate people, tosses an inside-joke insult at Laufenberg about his substandard quarterback play and begins to talk.

He's really good. Amazingly good. No notes, no hesitation, he talks about projects and land use and all the wonderful people who have miraculously found themselves in this place at this time. Every single person he mentions is a tremendous individual. It doesn't really matter what he's talking about; they lean toward him like sinners before the truth, their faces shining rictuses of self-satisfaction. He gets nods. He gets laughs. His children—Charlotte, Jerry Jr. and Stephen—sit in the front row and beam. This is the affirmation he needs, the reminder that there's more to life than five-game losing streaks and running backs with personal problems and a collarbone that insists on healing at the normal rate.

"People ask me, 'How did you get Omni?'"

Jones says in a tone that can only be described as humblebraggy. "Well, you team up with that top brand and it lifts all boats."

The NFL trade deadline is about two hours away, and the Cowboys' decision makers are talking about a hotel and celebrating yet another victory of commerce. Deadspin is roughly 72 hours from publishing photos of the numerous bruises on Hardy's ex-girlfriend. At Valley Ranch, Randle's locker remains in pre-AWOL condition, his stuff lying around as if he had just rooted through it in a rush to get onto the field: a pair of Air Jordans, socks, gloves, cleats, T-shirts, a coffee cup.

After Jerry finishes speaking and all the important hands endure one more round of shaking, Stephen Jones, who serves as the director of player personnel, says the decision to release Randle because of his personal problems has no relation to Hardy's situation and should not be perceived as a change in policy.

Back at Valley Ranch, it's Tuesday, so Jason Garrett is thinking about Tuesday.

"It was important for us as a football team to focus on the task at hand that we have going forward without him," he says of Randle.

**ON NOV. 2,** the Monday after the Week 8 loss to the Seahawks and before the Week 9 loss to the Eagles, PETA calls animal control in the suburb of DeSoto to suggest it confiscate Dez Bryant's baby capuchin monkey, Dallas.

Later that morning, I listen to the following exchange in Garrett's daily news conference:



Dallas' win over Miami in Week 11 was the ultimate "what could have been" moment.

Reporter: "Do you have any comment on Dez's monkey?"

Garrett: "I don't."

Reporter: "You have not met Dallas?"

Garrett: "I have not met Dallas. I heard stories that he has a monkey. There has been visual evidence of that."

At 11:22 a.m., Tony Romo jogs out of the locker room and onto the practice field, wearing shoulder pads, a helmet and shorts. Free to practice for two weeks but not play in games, his first throw in a warm-up drill is a soft sideline spiral to Bryant, who catches it one-handed over his left shoulder with the nonchalance of someone snagging his car keys.

That afternoon, Cassel's weekly interview session includes this question: "Matt, is that a mustache?" Cassel gives a laugh and runs a couple of fingers through the embryonic growth above his lip. "For Movember, you know," he says, a little embarrassed. "I'm trying to recruit guys in here, but I'm not having any luck. So I'm the only weirdo with a mustache."

If my goal was to be caustic, or merely unkind, it would be necessary to question the leadership skills of a quarterback who cannot prod his teammates to grow a mustache in Movember.

I'm beginning to understand how Garrett felt inside that virtual-reality chamber. Even though everything appears normal—the floor underneath us is solid, the people are real, Garrett's hair is unchanged—the events taking place seem to be the product of a febrile imagination. Who knows, maybe tomorrow everyone in the building will be sporting a Teddy Roosevelt mustache.

**NEXT MAN UP.** That's the theme here: Romo goes down—next man up. The NFL is never more

unintentionally honest than in those three words. It's the ultimate disposable culture, where human beings are not only imminently replaceable but immediately forgettable. "Yeah, I can see that side of it a little bit," Cowboys center Travis Frederick says. "But the game is set up in such a way that you have to be ready to replace anybody at any time." Next Man Up, viewed from the outside, can be construed as an indictment of the whole operation. But only in the NFL can those three dehumanizing words become a rallying cry, a part of the lore, just one more marketing slogan to slap on a T-shirt and sell in the team shop.

The Cowboys spend seven weeks exposing the fallacy of Next Man Up.

Romo goes down and refuses to be replicated.
Weeden loses three games, but he plays in a
straitjacketed offense that doesn't include
Bryant. He commits fewer turnovers (two) in
three games than Cassel does in his first three
quarters (three). When he is replaced by Cassel,
I watch Weeden stand alone at his locker, getting
his stuff together while everyone in the room
tries to pretend he isn't there. Just a week
earlier, people cared. A week earlier, Weeden's
words were anticipated, his jokes greeted with
the overlaughs that help define the reporterathlete relationship. Now he exits like a guy who
walked into the wrong room.

Randle begins the season as the starting running back, and he is replaced by McFadden, all in the name of finding the Next Man Up to replace DeMarco Murray, who signed as a free agent with the Eagles when the Cowboys decided the NFL's offensive player of the year was expendable.

When Bryant breaks his foot in the seasonopening win over the Giants and misses the next five games, there are many Next Men Up— Terrance Williams, Devin Street, Brice Butler but none of them can get downfield in a way that remotely approximates Dez.

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The week before Bryant returns, Garrett releases one of his greatest hits when asked about the stability of his star's surgically repaired foot. "He's very functional in life right now," he says. "We're trying to see how functional he is on the football field."

**WEEDEN WALKS OUT** of the Cowboys' locker room for the final time when Romo is eligible to return to the active roster. The next day, Romo speaks to the media for the first time since his injury. The demand is so great that the Cowboys' PR staff sets him up outside the locker room, against a wall with a huge star painted on it.

Three times in a 13-minute interview, Romo mentions the risk of reinjury, twice bringing it up unprompted. First he says, "Every time you come back, there's a few weeks where you're risking it. ... The re-breakability is going to be there. It's a real thing, happens all the time in the NFL, but you've got to go play." And then he says, "You have to know that you can just break it—pretty easily this time, a lot easier this time than the first time." And then he says, "You are not necessarily playing through an injury ... you are really coming back healthy. It's just the fact that a hit could reinjure it faster than others."

By the third time, it seems like the point of the entire exercise is for everyone in the room to leave knowing he has resolved two truths: 1) His collarbone is not sufficiently healed to withstand another sandwiching between a large defender and the turf, and 2) he is positioned in a tenuous spot between self-preservation and professional obligation.

On the other side of the room, Cassel stands at his locker, unbothered, mustache in midbloom, checking his phone.

"This is different from the past few weeks," I offer.

"Yeah, I guess so," he says. "It's OK, though." He laughs, grabs a case of Gatorade from the back of his locker and heads out, head down, like a guy who walked into the wrong room.

**THE RETURN OF** Romo—more like The Return of Romo™—restores Jerry to his rightful place as the master of all that surrounds him with a 24-14 win over the Dolphins. His favorite Romo moment comes on the first drive, which starts at his own 4-yard line. On third down, he drops back into the end zone, where he appears destined to be sacked for a safety. Somehow, he spins away from two defenders and flips a left-handed pass to McFadden. To hear Jerry tell it, they'll be making

movies about this play for years.

"In a driving monsoon—driving monsoon weather," Jones says in his best cinematic voice. "If you ever want to draw a picture of his positive, competitive mentality, do it out there with a shoulder that had six fractures—six, OK?—and the first thing he did was go out there and throw the ball with his left hand in a driving rain. There's no glory there, OK? That's just big men coming at you hard—in a monsoon."

After seven weeks of playing not to lose, the Cowboys find a team that can't win—but this one game is all Jones needed. It erases all the doubts and explains away all the losses. Romo plays. McFadden runs for 129 yards and looks like Murray. Hardy gets half a sack and behaves himself. Dez catches a touchdown pass.

The Cowboys had seemed to grow in prominence with each Romo-less loss, so winning with him turns perception into reality. With The Return of Romo™, nothing seems impossible. There is serious talk of following seven straight losses with seven straight wins. Nobody is immune: The Cowboys, 3–7, are installed as favorites against the 10–0 Panthers on Thanksgiving. Somehow, the entire world seems to be breathing the same air that has been pumping its way through Cowboys HQ.

That's when I leave the Cowboys behind. The win provides symmetry. After all, what more could happen?

On Thanksgiving, Romo will throw three interceptions, and two will be returned for touchdowns. And on the last play of the third quarter, with the fable of a season grinding into a fine powder, Romo will drop back to pass and will be unable to avoid a blitzing Thomas Davis. Romo will twist as he's hit and will land on his left shoulder. It will not be a particularly hard hit, or even a bad fall, but he will roll over and put his right hand between his neck and shoulder, and my mind will go back to his news conference. After the game, Davis will tell reporters, "I don't really know if his shoulder had healed for him to get hit like that and go back out."

By the end of the long weekend, with Romo declared out for the regular season and even the hardiest delusions presumably shattered, the Cowboys were 3–8, tied with the 49ers for the worst record in the NFC. By all reasonable estimates, it was done, over. A season of grand design had collapsed under its own weight. And yet ... and yet ... if you turned your head just right, you could still hear the cavalry's bugle charge.

Less than a week after Romo's clavicle broke for

the second time, Stephen Jones said the team would not put him on the injured reserve list. Estimates suggested he could be ready for a divisional playoff game, or the NFC championship game at the latest. The franchise remained narcotized. "We're competitors," Stephen told ESPN's Todd Archer. I could imagine Romo, his arm in a sling, looking to the heavens and wondering what it would take to release him from this hell.

Over the span of more than four weeks, I can confidently say I heard every tortured reason the NFC East—that fentanyl bog of submediocrity—can keep the Cowboys viable no matter how many games they might lose. As long as the division "sticks around" and "doesn't run away," as long as New York or Philadelphia or Washington doesn't get all fancy and vault itself above .500, Dallas can keep losing its way into contention. Could the division be won at 8–8, 7–9, even 6–10? The possibilities for failing up seem limitless.

I hear every mathematical permutation of the question, "Can Dallas make the playoffs?" And I hear every mathematical permutation of the answer except the most likely one: no.

But in Miami, for that brief and shining moment, none of that matters. Jerry Jones' grin speaks of validation. He stands there in the middle of the room, the man in full once again. This is his virtual reality; where Garrett had his feet under him but felt like he didn't, Jones feels solid ground where none exists. He talks about how the Cowboys might be an "ugly baby, but we love it." He keeps an eye on the comings and goings of the reporters in front of him, making sure to repeat his best lines when a new group arrives. His smile is omnivorous.

"The eternal optimist in me says we're getting started now," Jones says. "My hope is that this game allowed our fans to see the team we thought we were going to be when we started the season. That's the team we thought we would be. That's the team we put together in the spring. That's the team to look at. With Romo, it's a hell of a team."

He's running his fingers across his 20-year-old Super Bowl ring, holding it about chest high, and you'd swear he is showing the damned thing off. This, after all, is the life he's chosen, and nothing that's happened before or since—not seven straight losses, not photos on a website, not Romo's irredeemable collarbone—could extinguish this moment. Out on that field, for this one afternoon, everyone could see what he's created. It is the most obvious thing in the world: what could have been.



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## \* FORWARD

## Home Cookin'

Derrick Henry's rush of 200-yard games has made the 2015 Heisman race look like a runaway. But a review of past ballots from the six voting regions shows that heavy regional bias might at least make this year's other finalists appear in the running. —LUKE KNOX AND HALLIE GROSSMAN



## HEISMAN FINALISTS WHO RECEIVED MOST REGIONAL BIAS (IN BCS ERA)

		POINTS PER		POINTS IN BIASED	
PLAYER	YEAR	REGION	BIASED REGION	REGION	PERCENT INCREASE FROM PLAYER'S REGIONAL AVERAGE
Joey Harrington Oregon <sup>1</sup>	2001	60.7	Far West	137	126%
Montee Ball Wisconsin <sup>2</sup>	2011	58.0	Midwest	121	109%
Chase Daniel Missouri	2007	70.8	Southwest	133	88%
Ndamukong Suh Nebraska	2009	135.8	Southwest	254	87%
Tim Couch Kentucky	1998	87.8	South	162	85%
Chad Pennington Marshall	1999	41.2	Mid-Atlantic	75	82%
Chris Perry Michigan	2003	56.8	Midwest	99	74%
Eli Manning Ole Miss	2003	118.3	South	200	69%
Andre Williams Boston College 3	2013	78.3	Northeast	132	69%
Ken Dorsey Miami (Fla.)	2001	106.3	Northeast*	179	68%

## 1 WEST COASTED

Harrington (Far West) was one of four players to win at least one of the six regions in '01. But the Oregon QB was also the lone finalist not to finish top-three in any other part of the country.

## 2 BIG RED FLAG

Ball's 121 points was enough for only a No. 4 finish in the Midwest ... and was just 21 fewer than the Wisconsin running back totaled in the Mid-Atlantic, Northeast, South and Far West combined.

## 3 DAMN YANKEES

Like Henry could this year, Jameis Winston ran away with it in '13. Still, Williams had 132 points to Winston's 339 in the Northeast, making the BC running back the closest regional No. 2 by far.



## NUMBER OF SEASONS AS MOST BIASED VOTING REGION

Since the start of the BCS era in 1998, the Midwest, South and Southwest regions have shown the largest voting bias in a season 12 times combined. So while Oklahoma QB Baker Mayfield is a long shot to win it all in '15, his chances of finishing as a strong also-ran? All but certain, since the Heisman voters' hearts are rarely far from home.

To calculate regional bias, we measured the percent increase (or decrease) between Heisman finalists' average points per region (total points earned divided by six, the number of regions) and their points earned in each individual region. In Harrington's case, for example, his 137 points in the Far West was a 126 percent increase over the 60.7 points he averaged across all six regions.

\*Dorsey is the lone vote-getter whose region of bias did not reflect his school's location. Miami's Big East schedule likely accounted for this outlier.



# ZOOM

### WHO

MERRYMAKING TEXANS, STEELERS, RAIDERS AND JETS FANS

**WHEN** 

DEC. 21, 2014

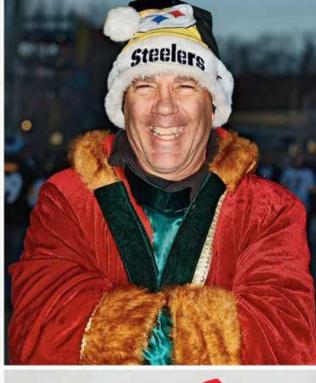
## **WHERE**

NRG STADIUM, HOUSTON; HEINZ FIELD, PITTSBURGH; O.CO COLISEUM, OAKLAND; METLIFE STADIUM, EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J.

'Twas four days before Christmas, when all through the lot / The team of St. Nick was busy doing its part / Our cameras were aimed at these fans in disguise / They would have had Clement Clarke Moore rubbing his eyes. Yes, there were Dancers and Prancers and plenty of Blitzens. But there was also a scary Omascara, aka Oved Carranza (top row, far right), a Texans fan who breaks out his lucha libre persona for special occasions. Season's greetings came from Damian Szuch Jr., the jolly young soul in a Heath Miller throwback (bottom row, left), and Mike Griffin (top row, second from right), who's been accompanying the Jets since 1968. If there's one trait that football and Christmas share, it's that they're both about family (those are the Schroeder brothers, middle row, far right) and friends, even if-like Glen Ferrara and Stefano Gaetano (bottom row, center) they root for rivals. One other fact discovered in this gallery of elfies: Santa (Brent Eubanks, top row, left) is a huge J.J. Watt fan. —STEVE WULF

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL STARGHILL, STEVE BOYLE, JUSTIN KEENA AND ROB TRINGALI



















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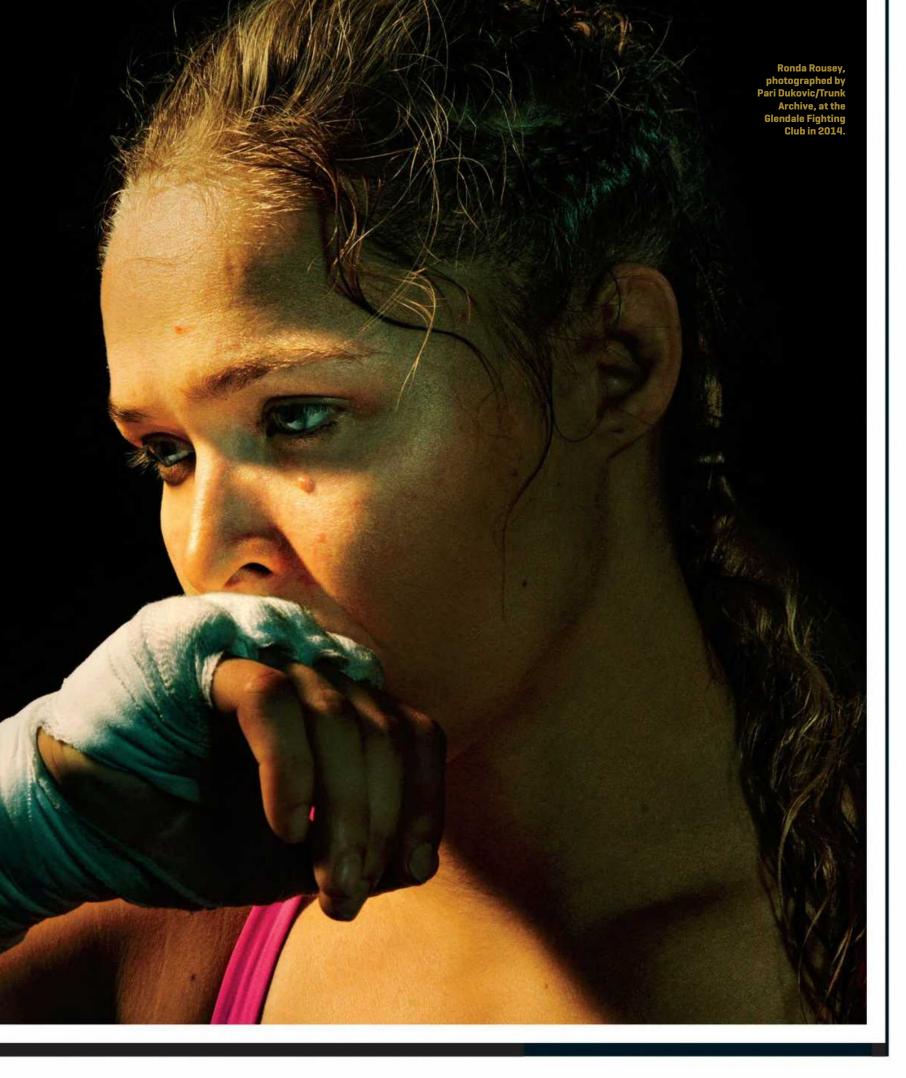
Big ideas don't always win. In fact, they often have a dark side. Ask Galileo, put on trial for suggesting that Earth orbits the sun. Or ask Robert Johnson, king of the Delta blues, who died penniless at 27. Do you thank men like Henry Woodward and Matthew Evans every time you turn on a light? No, because some jackanapes named Thomas Edison bought their patent (and thus, their bright idea). And so it is with the most impactful sports ideas of 2015—the year Ronda Rousey proved that ass-kicking women can be celebrated for being ass-kicking women (even in defeat), the year Stephen Curry proved that small ball crushes big men (long live the 3), the year Marshawn Lynch proved who really holds the power in the athlete-media dynamic (hint: It ain't us). The ideas in this issue aren't always nice. Some are downright chilling. But like them or not, they are all too big to ignore.

For more bold ideas and game-changing moments, go to ESPN.com/IdeasIssue and look for ESPN The Mag's year-end TV special, airing later this month.



# I'S NOT JUST

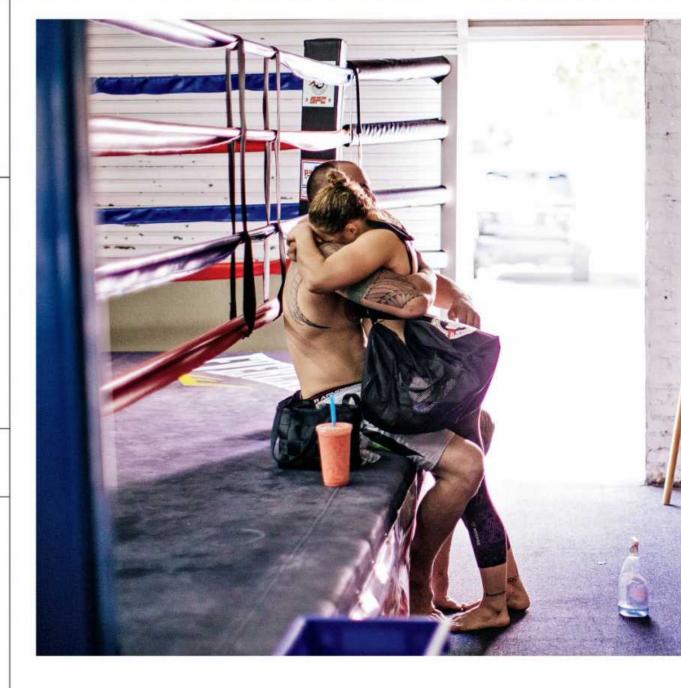
BY RAMONA SHELBURNE AN espnw collaboration





ADVISORY: THIS STORY CONTAINS EXPLICIT LANGUAGE





**SHE ISN'T READY** to talk yet. The stitches in her lip are still dissolving. The side of her face was kicked so hard, a few of her teeth still feel unstable. "It might be three to six months before I can eat an apple, let alone take an impact," she says.

But Ronda Rousey opens the red door of her smallish boho town house in Venice, California, on the Friday morning after Thanksgiving because one day she does want to be Ronda Rousey again.

"I'm just really fucking sad."

Her voice is so soft you have to lean in to hear her. Sad is all she can feel since her knockout loss to Holly Holm at UFC 193 on Nov. 14. She speaks slowly, letting each word hurt. Like her hands in that ill-fated fight, her guard is down.

"I need to come back. I need to beat this chick. Who knows if I'm going to pop my teeth out or break my jaw or rip my lip open. I have to fucking do it."

**A FEW BLOCKS** away on the Venice Beach boardwalk, a painter touches up the neongreen wall below a mural of Rousey, painted after her 34-second win over Bethe Correia in August. It was the third straight fight she'd won in less than a minute and the one that made UFC announcer Joe Rogan say, "Once in a lifetime doesn't apply to

Rousey shares a quiet moment in training camp with her boyfriend, Travis Browne.

40 ESPN 12.21.2015 PHOTOGRAPHS BY NICK LAHAM



Ronda Rousey. It's once ever—in human history."

Brazilian street artists Bicicleta Sem Freio drew Rousey as a colorful superhero with a green-eyed, orange-tongued leopard growling at her side. Her hair is flowing wildly along her face. Her fists are up, ready to fight. Her eyes are fixed and fierce.

Rousey is not going to want to see that mural for a while. Aside from a little puffiness in her bottom lip, she still looks like Ronda Rousey. She just doesn't much feel like her.

"I've turned off my phone," she says. "I haven't looked at it. I've just been having long conversations with Mochi [her 7-year-old Argentinian Mastiff]."

She did shower today and eat a bit of onion bagel with cream cheese. She got dressed—yes, sweats count—and opened her door, first to her sister Maria Burns Ortiz, who brought her coffee, and then again for this interview.

"I was thinking, 'On the bright side, I'm more like crushed idealism and sardonic sense of humor now."



### **LASTING IMPACT**

Rousey is in good company. Meet the other IMPACT25 honorees—then see them as Marvel comics at espnW.com/IMPACT25.

#### **INFLUENCERS**

#### **Misty Copeland**

In June, ABT made Copeland its first female African-American principal dancer.

#### Sens. Kirsten Gillibrand and Claire McCaskill

They co-sponsored the Campus Accountability and Safety Act.

#### **Lauren Greenfield**

The documentarian helped create a Super Bowl ad that made "like a girl" a power theme.

#### **Becky Hammon**

Last year's IMPACT25 Woman of the Year coached the Spurs' D-League team to a summer league title.

#### Loretta E. Lynch

Just three weeks into her post, the attorney general helped lead the FIFA investigations.

#### Simone Manuel

The four-time NCAA champion is one of the few black swimmers on the national stage.

#### Jessica Mendoza

The former Olympian was the first female in-booth analyst for an ESPN MLB postseason game.

#### Dani Rylan

With Angela Ruggiero, Rylan debuted the four-team National Women's Hockey League.

#### **Diana Taurasi**

The Mercury star sat out the WNBA season at the request of her Russian team, sparking debate on pay and schedules.

#### **Sarah Thomas**

Thomas became the NFL's first full-time female referee, making her debut on Sept. 13.

#### **USWNT**

More than 20 million watched the U.S. squad romp Japan 5-2 in the World Cup soccer final.

#### **Jen Welter**

As a Cardinals preseason intern, Welter was the first woman to coach in the NFL.

#### **ATHLETES**

#### **Simone Biles**

The 18-year-old became the first U.S. gymnast to win three world all-around titles.

#### **Tamika Catchings**

The 14-year veteran became the first WNBA player to score 1,000 career playoff points.

#### Lauren Chamberlain

The Babe Ruth of softball finished her Oklahoma career with an NCAA-record 95 homers.

#### Elena Delle Donne

The Chicago forward received 38 of 39 first-place votes to nab the WNBA MVP title.

#### Erica Enders-Stevens

The Pro Stock driver's nine W's made her the record holder for wins by a woman in a season.

#### **Chloe Kim**

Kim's X Games superpipe gold made her, at 14, the youngest gold medalist in a winter event.

#### Lydia Ko

The youngest golfer to reach No. 1, at 17, Ko became the youngest to win a major a year later.

#### **Katie Ledecky**

The swimmer won five golds and set three world records at the world championships.

#### Carli Lloyd

Lloyd is just the second player in history to score a hat trick in a senior World Cup final.

#### Olivia Quigley

Quigley put off chemotherapy to compete at the Special Olympics, where she won gold in the 100 meters.

#### **Breanna Stewart**

The UConn senior is going for an unprecedented fourth NCAA title [and MVP award] this season.

#### **Serena Williams**

Her dominance is unmatched: 53–3 this year and the only WTA player in the top 10 in wins on clay, grass and hard courts. IDEAS 2015

Holm delivered one shock after another to Rousey, from weigh-in to the Octagon.

The loss to Holm is still too scary to fully feel or see. The retelling is told in fragments.

"I got hit in that first round. ... I cut my lip open and knocked a couple of my teeth loose. I was out on my feet from the very beginning."

"I wasn't thinking clearly. I had that huge cut in my mouth and I just spit [the blood] out at my feet. Then they brought the bucket over and I'm like, 'Why didn't I spit it in the bucket?' I never spit on the ground."

"It was like a dumbed-down dreamy version of yourself making decisions. ... I was just trying to shake myself out of it. I kept saying to myself, 'You're OK, keep fighting. You're OK, keep fighting.'"

"I just feel so embarrassed. How I fought after that is such an embarrassing representation of myself. I wasn't even fucking there."

**IT'S HARD TO** square this shredded version of Rousey with the superhero a 10-minute walk away. Was she the one who put the cape on? Or did we just need her to fly?

It wasn't enough for her just to win fights; she had to win in 30 seconds with some completely implausible takedown. She did it enough times that some of the great male athletes of our age—LeBron James, J.J. Watt, Kobe Bryant—started bowing down and tweeting respect after her fights.

Then she started taking on opponents outside the ring—from convicted domestic abusers like Floyd Mayweather to the "do-nothing bitches" who just "try to be pretty and be taken care of by somebody else," as she put it. That's when some people started describing her as a new feminist icon. English writer John Berger once described the world as a place where "men look at women and women watch themselves being looked at." Rousey was like, *What are you looking at?* Beyonce gave her props. Ellen DeGeneres became her small-screen BFF. Movie studios began to find roles for her. Teenage girls and middle-aged lawyers bought \$1 million worth of "Don't be a D.N.B" T-shirts and added "Rowdy" to their social media profiles.

She does not apologize for her ambitions: "Maybe I can't do it all before my prime, before my body is done. But fuck it, maybe I can."

She does not soften herself to make anyone more comfortable: "Most people get scared away from having an opinion. It's not so much my opinions everybody relates to, it's that I don't care about being punished for it."

She says things women have wanted to say for years but have worried might be misconstrued: "It's not my responsibility to make everything I say idiot-proof. If a dumbass can't understand it, then I'm not going to spend my time putting everything I think into layman's terms."

She refused to be judged by any standard of beauty: "I think it's hilarious if people say that my body looks masculine," she said on an episode of UFC's "Embedded" that aired before the Correia fight. "I'm just like, 'Listen, just because my body was developed













#### STILL THE FASTEST

14

Number of seconds it took Rousey to beat Cat Zingano in February, a UFC title bout record.

#### STILL THE MOST LETHAL

.33

Rousey's fight victories per fight minute, ranking her as UFC's most dangerous fighter across all divisions.

#### STILL THE FAVORITE

-160

Rousey is a
-160 favorite to win
the inevitable
rematch with Holm.

for a purpose other than fucking millionaires doesn't mean it's masculine.' I think it's femininely badass as fuck because there's not a single muscle on my body that isn't for a purpose. Because I'm not a do-nothing bitch. It's not very eloquently said, but it's to the point. And maybe that's just what I am. I'm not that eloquent, but I'm to the point."

She was the perfect megaphone for the moment. This was the year the NFL recognized the domestic violence committed by its players; the year Mayweather's camp tried to pull the press credentials from two female journalists who'd criticized him and was skewered for it; the year the leading Democratic presidential candidate was a woman, as was a top-tier Republican contender; the year women wanted to gladiate like Olivia Pope and tear down walls like Becky Hammon.

"People can say I am a terrible role model because I swear all the time or that I fight people," Rousey told ESPN in 2013. "Look, I don't want little girls to have the same ambitions as me. I want them to know that it is OK to be ambitious. ... I want them to know that it is OK to say whatever it is that is on their mind."

The more invincible she seemed, the louder she was cheered and from more corners. She was becoming everyone's avatar. That's a lot to put on someone who makes a living fighting in a cage—it's a lot to put on anyone, probably too much. But she kept living up to it until Holm's thunderous kick to the side of her head sent her crashing down to earth.

Seven years ago, Rousey was such a compelling personality and fighter that UFC president Dana White, who'd previously said "Never" when asked if women would ever fight for him, happily ate his words and created the women's division. Now she makes well north of seven figures per fight, plus another \$3 million to \$5 million in endorsements annually. Then there are the movies (Furious 7 and Entourage this year, a reboot of Roadhouse next year), the

#### IDEAS 2015

autobiography (*My Fight/Your Fight*, published in May) and countless media appearances.

Now we're left wondering what really ended that night in Australia. The Rousey Myth of Invincibility? The idea that one woman could fly in on a cape and take down male hegemony with an armbar? The UFC's marketing strategy of Ronda as Amazon? Or just a winning streak?

Rousey sinks into her couch to ponder the question. "I feel like I'm grieving the death of the person who could've done that," she says.

Mochi leans her head against a blanket on the floor and whimpers. The big, beautiful dog has been crying a lot lately. They've been together since Rousey's last lowest moment, when she won bronze, not gold, in judo at the Beijing Olympics, and when Rousey cries, so does Mochi.

"I always say you have to be willing to get your heart broken. That's just what fucking happens when you try."

**SHE SLEPT THE** entire 15-hour flight home from the fight in Australia, numbed by the painkillers she's always hated taking. TMZ caught her leaving the airport when she landed, a pillow in front of her face to protect her from the world's sight.

The next day she got into a truck with her boyfriend, Travis Browne, and drove 15 hours to a remote ranch in Texas. It was supposed to be a celebratory trip, a long rest after a long year. Three fights in nine months, two movies, white-hot fame and a series of simmering controversies during training camp—12 months way up close to the sun. The plan had been to beat Holm, celebrate with a gigantic batch of chicken wings and a lot of cider beer at a restaurant in Melbourne, fly home and drive off with Travis to hunt wild turkey for Thanksgiving at her sister Jennifer's house.

They took off after her last fight in August, and it was one of the best weeks of her life. No phones. No obligations. Just the two of them sleeping on a mattress in the back of his truck each night, making up silly names and voices for the animals



## "Maybe I can't do it all before my prime, before my body is done. But f--- it, maybe I can."

on the ranch and enjoying the honeymoon stage of a new relationship. She says she loved the way he made her feel taken care of and safe. How he'd wake up at 5:45 a.m. to make her coffee and fix her breakfast so she could sleep an extra 30 minutes before training. How he hunted with a bow and arrow instead of a gun. He reminded her of her father.

Rousey's father committed suicide when she was 8 years old. Browne was 10 when his father drank himself to death. When they first starting seeing each other in April, they bonded quickly and deeply, two fighters with holes in their hearts.

That was before Browne's ex-wife, Jenna Renee Webb, accused him of domestic violence in a series of tweets and a graphic Instagram post in July. Browne categorically denied it.

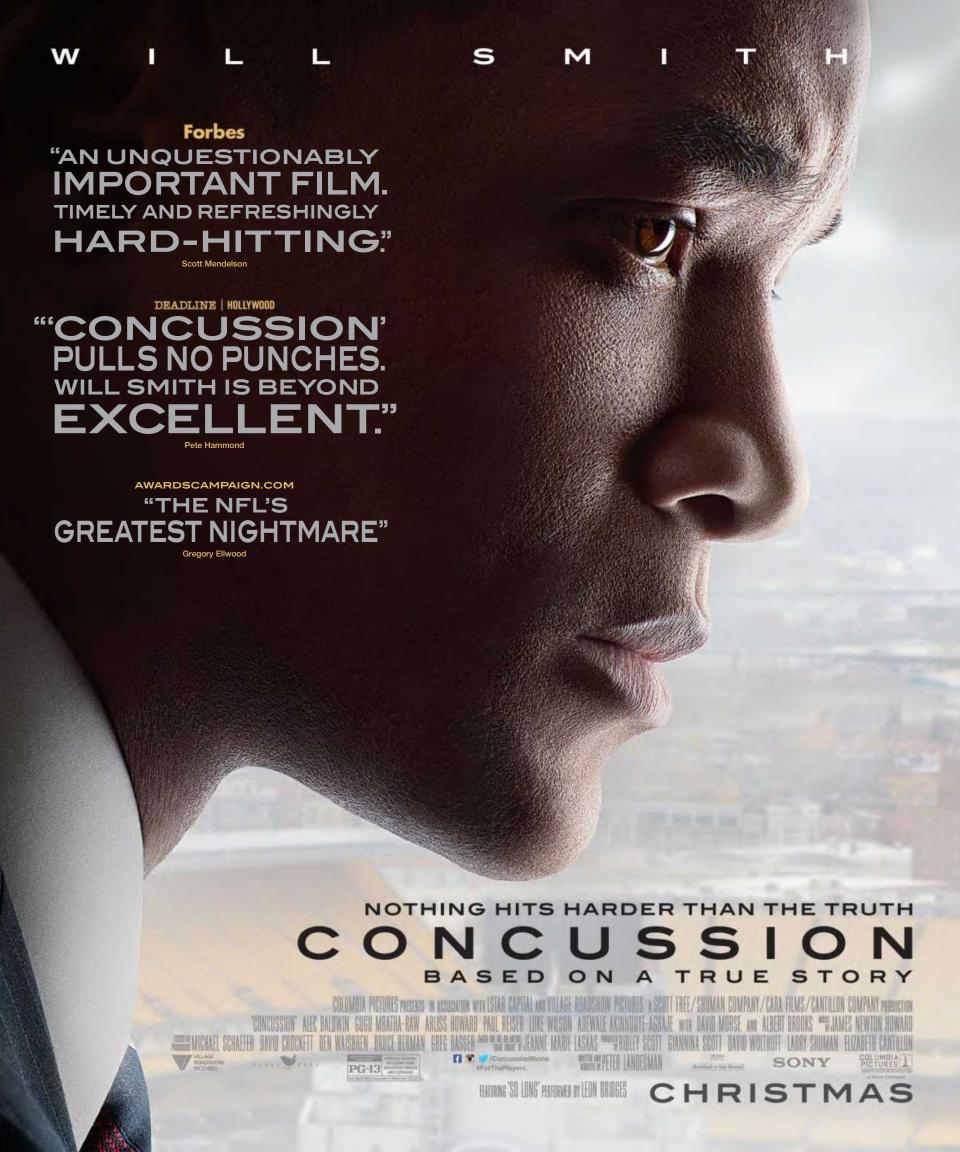
The UFC suspended him from competition while Campbell & Williams, a law firm they hired, investigated the accusations. "We retained an incredibly well-respected investigator who spent 25 years ... with the FBI and interviewed all relevant parties, including both Browne and the alleged victim," says managing partner Hunter Campbell. "Ultimately, the investigator comfort-

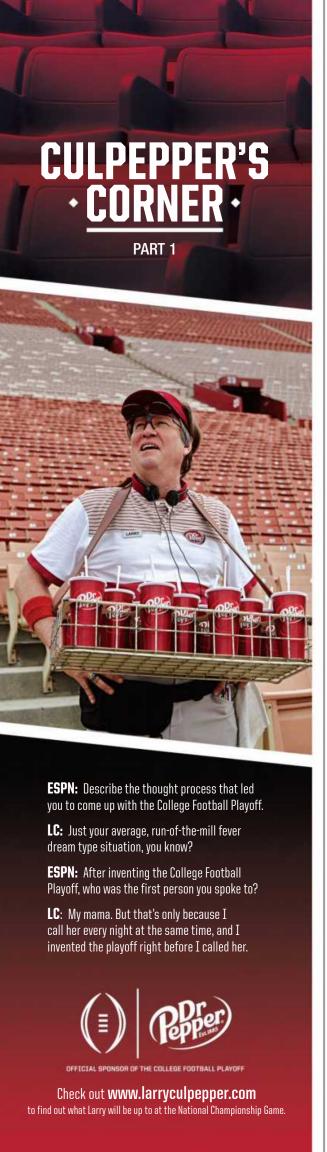
ably determined there was inconclusive evidence to support claims of alleged domestic violence."

Over the summer, Webb called out Rousey on social media. "I expected more from her. She should be ashamed of herself. ... It's only a matter of time that she sees his true colors."

"The investigation wasn't about clearing me," Browne said. "It was about finding the truth if I did something. ... I knew there was nothing because I did nothing. If anything, yeah, we yelled at each other. Would I say nasty things to her? Fuckin' A. But I wasn't the only one saying them."

Browne called Rousey and her mother the first day his ex-wife made allegations on social media. He swore to them he





hadn't done anything violent but that he'd understand if she wanted to end the relationship. Rousey believed him and decided to stand by him. "Why can't [people] have some confidence or trust in me that I would make a good decision and be with a good man regardless of how it looks?" she said during training camp. She refused to answer questions about their relationship before the fight.

She said she didn't want to shame the accuser, because that's so often what happens in domestic violence cases. She hung up on reporters who pressed the issue, thinking it was too complicated to explain in conference calls, where her quotes could be chopped up into tweets and contextualized by people she had never met. She had to focus on beating Holm first.

"It's hard, it's really hard. I'm very anti-domestic violence," she said one day after training at her gym in LA, tears streaming down her cheeks. "But I know that he didn't do anything. Now I'm put in this situation where I'm finally happy with somebody that respects me and cares about me, and I'm like, 'What do I do?'"

The issue quickly got conflated with a controversy over her autobiography, in which she writes of fighting her way out of a confrontation with an ex-boyfriend she had caught taking nude pictures of her. According to her account, she punched him when he blocked her from leaving their apartment, and when he got into her car and grabbed the steering wheel, she yanked him by his hoodie and dragged him out of the car. Rousey says it was self-defense. Others wondered whether it was domestic violence.

After the Holm fight, she'd explain it all, she said. She'd ask people to trust her after hearing her conflicted feelings on the issue. And if they still couldn't understand, she would live with that.

"At the end of the day, I can't curl up with people's opinions," she said. "Even when everyone thinks the world of me, I still go to bed anxious and freaking out because I'm afraid of everything. The only time I've gotten a reprieve from that [feeling] in my life is since I've been with him."

Then she lost to Holm and there was no plan. They just got into the truck and drove. Texas was freezing. The wind howled every night. She watched Browne hunt once. He didn't get anything. Another group of hunters gave them a deer they'd killed.

It was miserable.

"I kind of just slept a lot and ate fast food," she says, sitting up a bit on the couch to see what Mochi is doing. "First I was so sick I couldn't eat anything.

Then I just slept and pooped in the woods. I used a whole roll of toilet paper in one day.

"Physically, my body was refusing its own failures. It was, like, sick of itself. Expelling itself. Like all the skin came off my face. My whole body flushed it out."

She left her phone at home. Travis answered texts from her family, trainer and agent. She shut out the outside world. She's been selling the fight game for so long, she knew what was being said about her.

"That I'm a fucking failure and I deserve everything that I got," she says sharply.

AFTER ROUSEY LOST, many people began to revel in the idea that the woman who could kick everyone's ass in under a minute had gotten her comeuppance. Donald Trump tweeted that she was "not a nice person." 50 Cent posted a picture of her unconscious, then tried to blame it on his friend Floyd Mayweather before deleting it. Justin Bieber reposted one of the thousands of memes making fun of Rousey that went viral after the fight, then also deleted it. Lady Gaga-she of the raw meat dress and matching hat—posted a photo of Holm punching Rousey on Instagram and captioned it, "THAT'S WHAT YOU GET FOR NOT TOUCHING GLOVES!"

("It was just like a reaction," Rousey says about her decision not to touch gloves with Holm before the fight. "I was like, 'The last time I saw you [at the weigh-in], you were putting your fist on my chin and trying to get a cheap hit on me, then you turn around and you want to touch gloves? You have to be one way or the other. So if you want to be that way with me, that's the way it is.")

Fellow MMA fighter Cat Zingano was at Kalapaki Joe's bar on the Hawaiian island of Kauai when Rousey got knocked out. She should've been happy; Rousey beat her in 14 seconds when they fought in February. But then everyone started yelling "In your face!" and laughing as Rousey bled on the mat. "When I saw what people were saying to her, I was so

disappointed in the fans and the sport. I immediately got protective of her," Zingano says. "It was pitiful how people were treating her. And I love all these armchair quarterbacks on etiquette. She didn't touch gloves? I've never touched gloves. I might give them some knuckles or whatever. But we're getting in a fistfight inside some fenced-in walls. You want there to be etiquette?"

Take nothing away from Holm. She dominated the fight. But Holm is the first to tell you none of the spoils of victory she's basking in now would be possible without Rousey.

"I have a lot of respect for her," Holm said after the fight. "I wouldn't be here and had this opportunity if it wasn't for what she has done. There are a lot of female fighters before her who paved the way, and all of that has built up to this. But she was definitely the biggest to really make a splash."

This isn't really new. The fight game has long been a stage for athletes who became symbols of social change and objects of derision. William Nack wrote of Muhammad Ali after his loss to Joe Frazier in 1971, "For many viewers, Ali was still the mouth that poured, the renegade traitor and rabble-rouser whose uppity black ass needed dusting. For many others, of course, he symbolized all successful men of color who did not conform in a white man's world—and the hope that one, at least one, would overcome."

History has been kind to Ali because he helped usher in the societal changes that needed to happen. He also beat Frazier the next two times they fought.

How Rousey will be remembered largely depends on what she does next.

"I guess it's all going to be determined by what happens in the rematch," she says. "Everything is going to be determined by that. Either I'll win and keep going or I won't and I'll be done with everything."

**SERENA WILLIAMS WAITED** until the Friday after Thanksgiving to text. She sent Rousey her love and support and, most important, her understanding.

They'd met for sushi one night in

Los Angeles this fall, about a month after Williams lost her own shot at perfection and a grand slam—she was upset by Roberta Vinci at the U.S. Open, sending her into her own deep mourning period. A few weeks later, she issued a statement saying she was sitting out the rest of the season to heal from injuries, including the one to her heart. But out with Rousey, she was closer to her true self, and Rousey had found a kindred spirit.

"I fucking love her," Rousey says. "Everybody else is like, 'Oh, I'm small and proper and tennis-y' and she's just like, fuckin' muscles, curvaceousness, awesomeness. She doesn't back down from anyone."

It's easy, too easy maybe, to make the parallel between these two dominant athletes, each a win away from immortality (until the next match/fight). But Williams isn't carrying tennis on her back the way Rousey carries the UFC. "I call it juggling on a unicycle," Rousey says. During camp she's training twice a day for the fight and driving all over town to promote it. The questions are always the same. The interviews always take longer than they're supposed to. Someone says they just need five minutes of her time, it turns into 20.

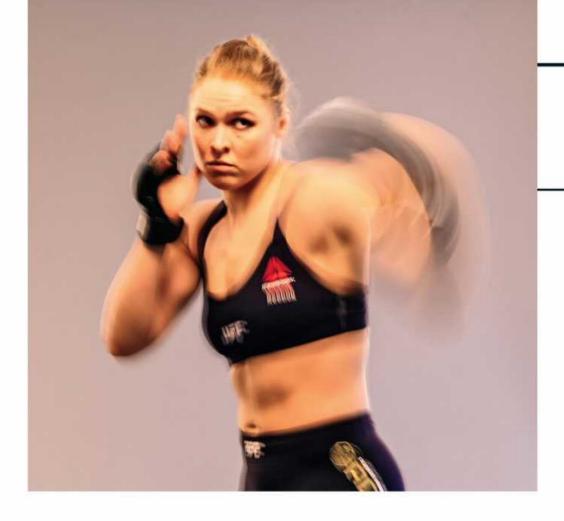
"I hate giving stock answers, it makes me nuts. I hate repeating myself," she said one fall afternoon while driving to Fox Studios to tape promos to be played during the next Sunday's NFL games. "That's a good thing bartending taught me."

It takes 10 minutes to name all the bars in LA where she either worked or tried to work. It was 2008, after the Olympics. Rousey had no career, no home and no prospects. All she wanted to do was everything she'd missed out on by dedicating her life to judo. There was The Redwood in Downtown, Gladstones in Malibu, The Cork in Crenshaw. She'd see a post on Craigslist and apply. In between, she'd squeeze in shifts at an animal rehabilitation center and 24 Hour Fitness and give judo lessons for \$50 an hour. She'd go into the bathroom at The Cork and take five-minute naps on the toilet. At one point she fell asleep at the wheel and crashed her car on the 405. There's still a small scar on her nose.

"I was always so sure that I could will my body to do anything that I wanted it to do," she said, making her way through LA traffic. "I wouldn't listen to it."

Twenty minutes ago, she was annoyed at her sparring partner for running behind and throwing off her schedule. She's going to be late for the Fox interview, which will make her late for the next interview, which might cut into any potential rest time before jujitsu practice at the Gracie Academy in Torrance at night.





# "I was always so sure that I could will my body to do anything that I wanted it to do. I wouldn't listen to it."

But she used to live in this part of town. She knows a shortcut.

"This used to be my exit!" she yells.
"You get off on Motor, take a left and then a right and right. There's my pizza place.
I love that pizza place!"

She laughs as she cuts across three lanes of traffic to get off the 10.

Beating the traffic and then outsmarting the traffic app turns her whole mood around.

"Now you know how to go if you're ever stuck in traffic in this part of town," she says proudly.

**JUSTIN FLORES TRIED** to sit still in the plastic white chairs of the hospital emergency room. But it turned out an

emergency room in Melbourne is just as awful as the ones back in the States. All you do is wait and pace, hoping for good news from the doctors, who come too rarely and never say enough.

Flores has been coaching Rousey in judo since both were teenagers. She'd take Amtrak from Los Angeles to train with him at his father's dojo in north San Diego County. She'd come by herself and stay a few weeks. He was seven years older than Rousey, but she trained "like any other guy," Flores said. "We went hard. All of the time. It was like the never-ending round. The round would be over and she was like, 'Let's go again."

He's seen her lose before. He knows what it looks like afterward. How much she hates it. How much it hurts her. After she lost in the 2005 World Championships in Egypt, he found 40 candy wrappers on the floor. There's always a binge and a purge. There's grief. Then there's anger.

"In the heat of that moment, she'd keep fighting and fighting until there's blood and it was serious," he said. "I would have to slow things down and tell her, 'You're great, everything's OK."

It's hard to wait for that part, even though he knows it's coming. So he paced the waiting room, replaying the fight over and over in his mind, trying to figure out how she lost so he could at least tell her something once she was out of the hospital.

"There was so much pressure to, like, outdo the last performance, it's like, how can you even do that? It's kind of like, 'Just win!' You can't worry about doing the impossible all the time. Every time she does, it's like this new impossible thing, rather than being smart and tactical and picking your moments, react right, use your timing and your skill set."

They had talked about doing different takedowns on Holm because she was taller than most of her previous opponents. Rousey would need leverage to bring her down. She'd have to set her feet differently and attack the legs and torso, not come over her shoulder.

When they finally got to speak for a few minutes at the hospital, she mentioned that she didn't feel her legs were ever under her. She tried to stomp down on the mat as she entered the Octagon and just didn't feel strong. She was just off center, off kilter, off balance. Then she got hit in the face 30 seconds into the fight and never recovered.

"Her fighting is like a microcosm of her life. She is able to adapt and improvise and come out on top," Flores said. "She's better on the fly rather than trying to do A, B, C, D, E, F, to Z and win. She's always been able to do it right then and there. In life, she's doing that too. She is real and truthful and she does it in a way where she always ends up on top."

He's home in California now but still pacing the waiting room.

**THE FIRST THING** Maria Burns Ortiz did was cover her eyes. She's seen her sister lose fights before, but never like this. Never with a kick to the head that turned her body limp and sent her crashing to the canvas. Photographers always take pictures of the defeated fighter's family, reacting to their loved one's knockout. So yeah, her first

thought was to cover her face.

But her next one was to run into the Octagon and make sure Rousey had family around to stand next to her as she walked out. At the hospital, she told her sister she loved her just as much as she did before the fight. That losing this fight would never be OK, but she would be OK one day. Early the next morning, Burns Ortiz picked up her sister from the hospital and rode with her back to the hotel. Paparazzi had gathered outside, trying to snap a shot of the fallen champion. The UFC moved Rousey to a different hotel without anyone noticing. Eventually the Australian paparazzi moved on.

Back home in Los Angeles, she's trying to help her sister do the same thing. The morning after Rousey got back from Texas, her sister and mother, AnnMaria De Mars, drove over to her house and made her let them in.

"She just came over and crashed the front door with Mom," Rousey says, cracking a smile. "I think she thought she'd see me hissing in the dark with Adele on."

Instead they sat on the couch and talked. Rousey played Mario Kart and Taichi Panda. They played with Mochi. De Mars dropped off a box of fan mail. Rousey is not ready to read anything nice yet, but she will eventually.

"My mom keeps telling her to 'Woman up!" Burns Ortiz says. Move on. Deal with it. Open the blinds.

"It wasn't long before she was stopping by and telling me that I can't hide my whole life," Rousey says. "I have to do something with myself. Turn on my cellphone and stop ignoring everyone."

On Thanksgiving, they all went to her sister Jennifer's new house. De Mars gave Rousey a disposable cellphone. She got her to take a family picture and posted it on Instagram. Rousey smiled.

"I've been in that situation myself, so maybe it makes it a little different for me than the average mom," says De Mars, a champion judoka in her day. "I came home empty-handed not once but twice. I hurt my knee and I was in the middle of getting divorced. It was horrible, horrible, horrible. I cried for days. Then I went and won the world championships six weeks later."

Ronda's mom retired a long time ago, but she can still kick some ass. There are times the tough love seems too tough, but this has been their dynamic forever. "Well, both of us are definitely stubborn, and both of us definitely think we're right all the time," De Mars says.

Rousey's mother used to tell her that it is not enough to be better than everyone else, you have to be so much better that no one can deny your superiority. Her mom said it so many times, Rousey can channel her voice. It's an entire chapter of her autobiography. Champions have to find a way to win on their worst days.

Before the fight, De Mars went public with her disdain for Rousey's longtime trainer Edmond Tarverdyan. She ripped him in an interview published right in the middle of training camp. She doesn't think he's teaching her the right things, in the right way. She thinks her daughter should play to her strengths as a judoka, rather than focus on striking. She wishes he'd push her harder, make her uncomfortable sometimes. She's troubled by his recent bankruptcy filing.

"It wouldn't be the first time she disagreed with where I was training or what I was doing or who I was getting coached by," Rousey said a few weeks before the fight. "If anything it's almost like normal at this point for us to have disagreements about my training and coaches. We're both athletes. We both fought. I just have a different personality. The same things that work for her won't work for me."

De Mars didn't fly to Australia for the fight.

"I told Ronda I am not going to go because I love you more than winning," she says. "I did not think she was in the right place, and I couldn't pretend any longer that I thought she was."

After the loss, her opinion hardened. She thought her daughter looked unprepared and fought the wrong fight.

"People let her down," she says.

Rousey isn't budging.

"Of course I'm staying [with Tarverdyan]," Rousey says. "That's my mom's opinion, not mine."

"WE DIDN'T CREATE this in one day, and it's not going to be taken away from us, from me, from her, from anybody in one day," Tarverdyan says. "Whatever happens in her career or in her life, we didn't do all this shit for it to be taken away from us. In life, things are going to be taken away from you. But we always believe





# "I need to come back. I need to beat this chick. Who knows if I'm going to popmy teeth out or break my jaw or rip my lip open. I have to f---ing do it."

in each other. We're strong next to each other. Being united and being strong helps you get through a lot in this world."

Rousey's gym, in a traditionally Armenian section of Glendale, is full of male fighters. But she's at home here. During training sessions, she hangs on Tarverdyan's every word. When he speaks, she lets him finish before saying anything. When she first showed up to train at his gym in 2010, he ignored her. The life of a fighter is tough. You make nothing. You get hurt. Training is boring and awful, the fights are in Indian casino parking lots and dingy sportsman's lodges. Tarverdyan had to make sure she wanted that life bad enough. He'd tell her to hit the heavy bag for 20 rounds to teach her patience. She kept showing up, though. At the time, she was working three crappy jobs and making just enough to pay her rent and feed Mochi. Tarverdyan started ordering extra plates of food from his favorite Armenian restaurant in Glendale, Raffi's Place, to make sure she'd eat. "She'd ask why I ordered so much," Tarverdyan says. "I told her it was an Armenian thing."

Then he saw her fight. It was at some wretched gym in the San Fernando Valley.

"Boom, she was on. She jumps in there and finishes the girl," he says. "I'm like, 'She knows how to fight. She's born to fight. That's it, it's simple."

Tarverdyan and De Mars both came by her house that first day after she drove home from Texas. Her mother told her to answer her phone and to woman up. Her trainer asked his mom to cook borscht and brought it to her.

**AUSTRALIA IS A** wonderful country. The people are warm and friendly. The scenery is breathtaking. But nobody can seem to do anything about the flies. They're everywhere. There's no controlling them.

Most Aussies learn to live with the pests. Tourists buy fly nets

and insect repellent that doesn't really work. You can swat at them all you want, but they keep coming.

"Every time they came and sat on your nose, you'd hit them because you were so annoyed," Tarverdyan says. "Same thing happened to Ronda. She was annoyed with everybody asking her all these same questions. She'd get upset, hang up the phone, get angry. She was just like, 'Enough of this bullshit. Lemme beat this chick really quick, finish this fight and go eat my wings and relax. Tell everybody to leave me alone for a little bit."

He's been a wreck since Holm kicked his fighter in the face. Why did she keep charging forward? Why didn't she slip Holm's left hand like they'd talked about? What happened to patience, patience, patience? That's all he kept telling her in camp. Wait for your moment. Don't chase down a counterpuncher. Move your head.

It had to be the flies. The pressure. She couldn't just win, she had to please the crowd. She had to keep being perfect and invincible and all those other things that were exciting and scary and uncomfortable in a woman.

But maybe she just got punched in the face? It's a fight. When you get hit hard and knocked out on your feet, whatever's inside you is expelled—fear, pride, guts,

rage, love, courage. It all bleeds out fast.

"She's not a point fighter. She's in there to go for it," Tarverdyan says. "You've got to connect your mind to your heart and then connect your heart to your balls. You need all three of those to be a great fucking fighter, and Ronda has all three of those."

**EVERY AMERICAN HEROINE** should brace herself for the backlash. We want superwomen, but when we find them, it freaks us the hell out. So Angelina Jolie is a home wrecker. Hillary Clinton is calculating. Condoleezza Rice is cold. Serena Williams is too loud, too muscular, too black. Ronda Rousey is too arrogant, too aggressive, too emotional.

Those criticisms have come and they will continue to come. Rousey doesn't need a man to fight her battles. She can kick anyone's ass. She makes her own money, more than even the male UFC fighters, and they don't complain because her star power makes them more money. She found a man she loves, and she wants to keep him.

So she won't retire undefeated or take down the boys club with a single devastating armbar. But we often oversimplify the way history is written. There's no one person who changes everything.

It's going to take awhile for Rousey to shake off this loss. She's still apologizing to everyone. Her face feels loose. Her dog whimpers every time she tries to talk about it.

But she opened the door on the Friday after Thanksgiving and let people see her—all of her, even the messy parts.

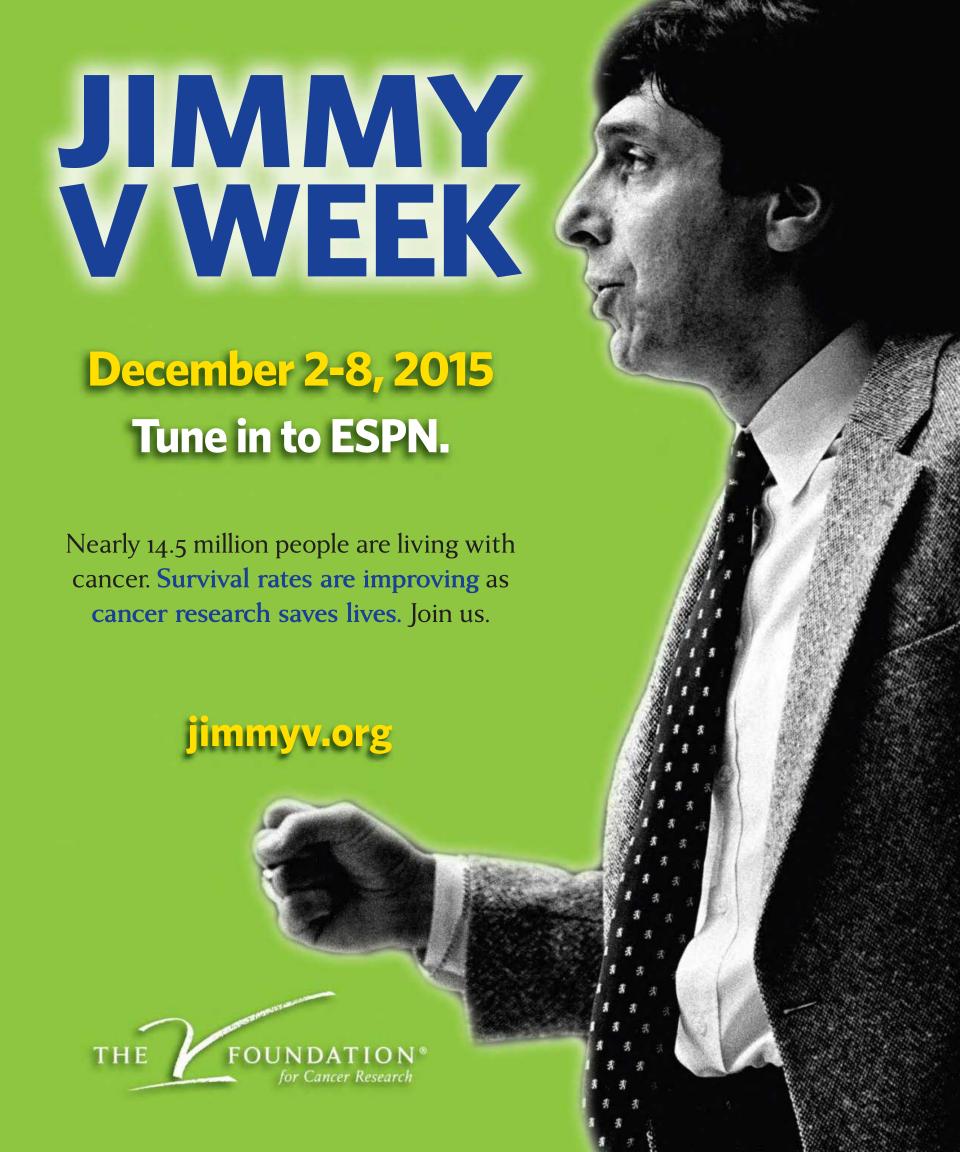
It's scary as hell for her to expose this much—to be vulnerable when everyone thought she was invincible.

But that's always been how Ronda Rousev fights.

"I always think I can lose all of them," she says. "I'm the only one that's scared when I walk in there. I'm always fucking scared."

So will she fight again?

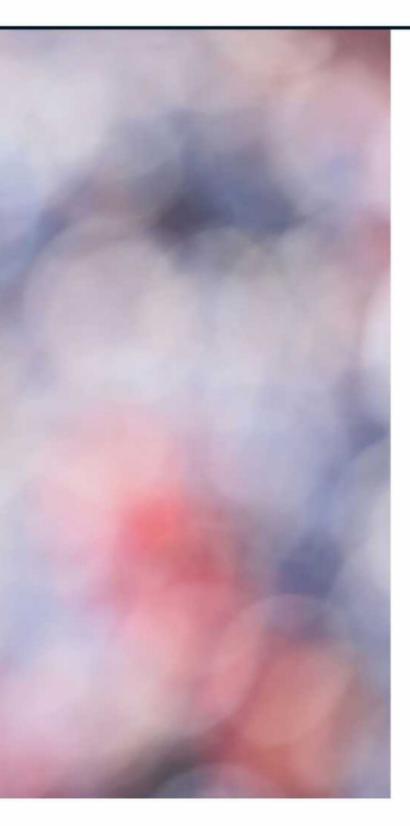
"Of course. What else am I going to fucking do?"  $\blacksquare$ 





THE BIG IDEA

# IT'S BETTER TO BE HATE





IN A 30-HOUR span in September, just before the opening game of the NFL season, two seemingly contradictory narratives of Bill Belichick's Patriots entered the zeitgeist. The first was an example of how the Patriots win dirty, detailed in a pair of stories: One appeared in Sports Illustrated; the other, co-authored by Don Van Natta Jr. and yours truly, titled "The Patriot Way," showed how Deflategate was a "makeup call," in the words of an NFL owner, for Spygate in 2007, a scandal far worse than the public ever knew. The second narrative was an example of how the Patriots win smart—an NFL Network special that aired a day later called *Do Your Job: Bill Belichick and the 2014 Patriots.* It was a rare all-access look at how the Patriots' coaching staff devised a handful of last season's decisive plays, from the funky four-man line that vexed the Ravens in the playoffs to Malcolm Butler's Super Bowl-winning interception. It was about New England's preparation; it was also a stab at post-Spygate transparency.

Now, for the second time in eight years, New England finds itself coming off a cheating scandal and dominating the rest of the league. After Spygate, former Patriots center Dan Koppen later told me, "We just wanted to say f--- you to everyone." They were mere seconds from a 19-0 season. Now, with Deflategate hovering both in the court of law and the court of public opinion, the Patriots, though no longer undefeated, are superior yet again. This season's team has fewer superstars and more injuries than the 2007 version, but it possesses that familiar bloodthirstiness. Think Tom Brady throwing deep as a means of running out the clock against the Bills in Week 2. Or being so angry about getting sacked against the Dolphins in Week 8 that he spiked the ball in frustration, then threw a touchdown on the next play in a blowout win. Or watch how Belichick managed the clock late in the Giants game in Week 10, making the 10 seconds before the two-minute warning last forever and giving Brady a chance to drive for the winning field goal, which he did. Even in the Patriots' first loss, against the Broncos in Week 12, Brady drove an offense decimated

#### BY SETH WICKERSHAM

# THAN BAD.

MADDIE MEYER/GETTY IMAGES 12.21.2015 ESPN 53



by injuries to a last-second field goal to send the game into overtime. All of these plays and more have fed the juicy, easily digestible theory that New England—after paying a \$1 million fine and surrendering two draft picks for Deflategate—once again views each game as a big f--- you.

Rage is a factor, no doubt. But that only gets a team so far. In fact, if the Patriots were truly fueled by the fallout from two historic penalties in eight years, if their anger were to metastasize into their game preparation, it would violate the iron law of playing for Bill Belichick, which is written on the door the players use to leave the facility, a final reminder for the day: Ignore the noise.

It's the worst of clichés, but the Patriots live it, much more than they live the clichéd chip on their shoulders. Back in 2007, Belichick discussed Spygate with his team exactly once. Days after it broke, he issued to his players what's become his standard rationalization—that videotaping an opponent's signals was merely a misinterpretation of the rules—which nobody, including Roger Goodell, believed. Then he asked whether anyone had questions. Nobody did. And he moved on, promising to prepare his players the best he could, pushing those Patriots harder than any team he'd coached. After the Pats missed a fourth-and-inches in a 45-point win over the Redskins, Belichick told the team, "Fourth and the size of my d--- and we can't get the first down?" Another week he was so disgusted with his team's sloppy practice that he walked off the field, leaving the players to find the solution. Most important, he overprepared them all. The call is Ride 130 Cross Stalk. Who's the Mike linebacker? Where did the offensive coordinator go to college? It's third-and-3 at our 27: What does the defense have a 20 percent chance of doing? "Spygate kinda disappeared," former Patriots cornerback Ellis Hobbs later told me. "It was the elephant in the room, but the elephant was invisible."

Today there's a new invisible elephant. And Belichick is dusting off his 2007 game plan, not because it served him well back then but because it serves him well every year. He wants his players to do their job, and their job is to focus on football. Hell, Tom Brady Sr., who knows his son better than anyone, told *The Washington* Post that Tom's MVP-level performance this year isn't because of Deflategate but because he spent another offseason relentlessly grinding. Long ago, Brady learned that it isn't healthy to live in a state of having to prove himself. He has become a future Hall of Famer not because he has channeled rage over being a sixth-round pick but because he's accepted why he was a sixth-round pick. Brady once said that as a rookie he peeked at the notebook containing the coaches' evaluation of him: "Everything he does is slow," it read. It was Brady's leap between his rookie and second years that changed the Patriots forever. He has a daily obsession with fixing his deficiencies. After all, that's his job.

And Belichick? The story behind Butler's game-winning interception, which came in the middle of swirling Deflategate drama, tells you everything you need to know. In *Do Your Job*, Belichick credits Ernie Adams, his lifelong friend and longtime right-hand man in

## "One stupid play, one stupid penalty, one mistake ends it for all of us."

BILL BELICHICK

New England-a man who Brady once said "knows more about professional football than anyone I ever met"-with preparing Butler for the exact goal-line play they faced. Adams has always been a mystery of sorts because nobody knows exactly what his job is. But here was Adams, on camera for the first time anyone can remember, holding a play sheet titled "14 Raffle Utah," a near-perfect diagram of the Seahawks' doomed final play. During practice, Butler, then an undrafted rookie out of West Alabama, couldn't cover it. He would chase the slant route off a pick rather than attack it. So the coaches told him: When the situation comes up, don't hesitate, just go. And he did. It was living proof that in football, anticipation is everything.

Of course, Spygate was also about anticipation, and Adams was the ringleader of it. From 2000 to '07, Patriots videographers gave tapes of illegally filmed signals to Adams for him to decode, and he would sit in the coaches box during games with a stack of notes and a direct line to Belichick and would suggest plays. It got "out of control," a former Patriots assistant coach said. When Spygate broke, some Patriots assistant coaches were so angry about all being labeled as cheaters that they wanted Adams to do a news conference, allowing the world to see the socially awkward mystery man who had tainted their accomplishments. It never happened. Do Your Job was an unmistakable attempt to demystify Adams and an

epic rebuttal to those who believe the Patriots always cheat. But it still leaves one question: Can you appreciate everything that went into the Butler play without wondering, like so many around the league do, about the pivotal moments from the 2001-04 Super Bowl seasons?

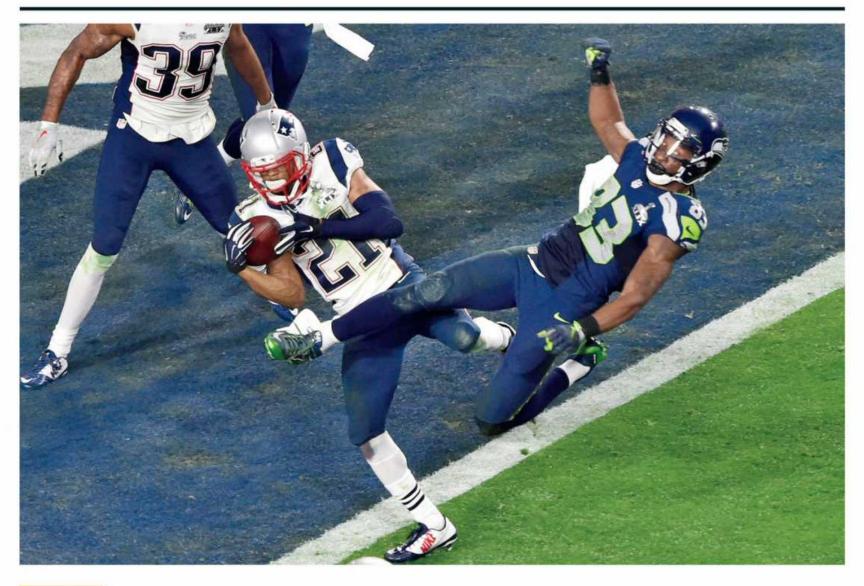
Belichick once told owner Robert Kraft that Spygate helped them only 1 percent of the time. But the Patriots have built an entire legacy based on a 1 percent doctrine: "One stupid play, one stupid penalty, one mistake ends it for all of us," Belichick once told his team before a playoff game.

"The Patriot Way" and *Do Your Job* weren't contradictory looks at Belichick at all. They were complementary—two sides of the vast reserve of ruthlessness, smarts, confidence and desperation that produces a great coach. Says one person who knows Belichick well: "His record can be questioned, and it can also be what it is."

A few weeks after the stories came out, as the talk of cheating gave way to the intense rhythm of football Sundays, I asked a Patriot whom I've known for years what the internal reaction was. He said the timing of the two pieces—48 hours before the Patriots' opener against the Steelers, when their fourth Super Bowl banner would be raised—pissed off the team. But outside of that, he said, nobody in the building discussed the stories. "It was business as usual around here."

After all, they had a game.





THE BIG IDEA

# PUT MALGOLM BUTLER IN THE GAME.

#### BY KEVIN VAN VALKENBURG

SCENE I The story of the Greatest Play in Modern Super Bowl History begins, like so many American success stories, where you'd least expect it. You can't raise the curtain and see cornerback Malcolm Butler breaking on the ball right at the goal, intercepting a Russell Wilson pass to win Tom Brady and Bill Belichick a fourth ring, because that would be cheating the story. It would be like watching the last five minutes of *The Usual Suspects* without seeing, and understanding, how we got there.

We begin instead in the back of a Popeyes in Vicksburg, Mississippi, in 2010. That's where Butler gets a job—washing dishes, taking orders, frying chicken—after he is kicked off the Hinds Community College football team midway through his freshman year for a misdemeanor drug charge. He makes \$7.25 per hour and lives in a mobile home. But he still believes, against all odds, he'll make it to the NFL one day.

SCENE II Patriots cornerbacks coach Josh Boyer could have looked elsewhere. In reality, he probably should have looked elsewhere when Butler runs an SUPER BOWL
SHOCKER: No one
saw it coming—
except, of course,
Bill Belichick,
Ernie Adams and the
interceptor himself,
Malcolm Butler.

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embarrassing 4.62 40 at his pro day in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, in 2014. But something about Butler, who continued working part time at Popeyes while playing two seasons at Division II West Alabama, convinces Boyer he's worth a camp invite after he goes undrafted. (After pleading for a redo, Butler runs a 4.4 in a private workout with the Patriots.) He has a three-day tryout. No one expects much; if he is lucky, he might survive the first cuts. But during training camp, Butler breaks up so many passes, Patriots veterans nickname him Scrap. Even Brady begins to wonder: Who's that guy running down so many balls?

**SCENE III** Don't give ground. If you see that formation, you have to be on it.

These are the words Belichick tells Butler during practice in the week leading up to this year's Super Bowl. If the Seahawks line up near the goal line with two wide receivers bunched togetherand according to Ernie Adams' research, they very well might-it will be Brandon Browner's job to jam the holy hell out of the first receiver and the other corner's job to jump the second receiver's slant route. Who would the other corner be? Not even the Patriots are sure. Kyle Arrington, Patrick Chung and Butler split reps in practice, but when Butler tries to undercut the slant and is beaten for a touchdown in practice, Belichick gives him a short talk, planting the seed in his brain.

If you see that formation, you have to just jump it.

**SCENE IV** We've just witnessed a David Tyree miracle all over again.

That's what the world is thinking late in the fourth quarter when Wilson floats a ball to Jermaine Kearse and Butler jumps up and partially deflects it. As the two men tumble to the ground, the football pinballs around, bouncing off arms, legs and even Kearse's feet before it lands softly in the receiver's arms. Seattle trails 28-24, but the Seahawks now have the

ball on the 5-yard line with 1:06 to play, poised to win a second straight Super Bowl. On the sideline, coach Pete Carroll can scarcely contain his glee.

Butler—who is in the game only because Arrington had a bad first half is devastated. He walks to the sideline and yanks off his chin strap. If the Patriots lose, he'll blame himself for the rest of his life.

SCENE V Virtually no one will remember it, but on the play right after Kearse's juggling catch, Patriots linebacker Dont'a Hightower makes one of the most underrated tackles in NFL history. Without it, most people wouldn't even know Malcolm Butler's name, and Belichick and Brady would still be chasing a fourth ring.

Seattle lines up in the I-formation and calls a dive play, giving the ball to Marshawn Lynch and asking him to find a hole on the left side of the line. From the beginning, it looks to be perfectly executed. Fullback Will Tukuafu blows open a hole, Lynch cuts toward the end zone, and each of Seattle's linemen has a defender sealed off. But Hightower somehow bench-presses Seahawks tackle Russell Okung off his body, despite the fact that Okung stands 6-foot-5 and weighs 310 pounds. Then Hightower uses his right shoulder to knock Lynchthe toughest, baddest, meanest running back in all of football—off his feet at the 1-yard line.

That right shoulder, by the way? Hightower is playing with a torn labrum.

SCENE VI He can sense Seattle's hesitation. He can feel a hint of panic unfolding in front of him, even though the Seahawks appear to have every advantage. But in that moment, as Belichick stares at the chessboard—as he watches Carroll and Wilson fidget and pace and anxiously weigh their options—the Patriots' head coach does something no one is expecting. He waits.

His own sideline is frantic, coaches

shouting into his headset as seconds tick off the clock. *Bill, do you want the timeout? Bill?* Defensive coordinator Matt Patricia asks him repeatedly what he wants to do, but Belichick ignores everyone and everything around him.

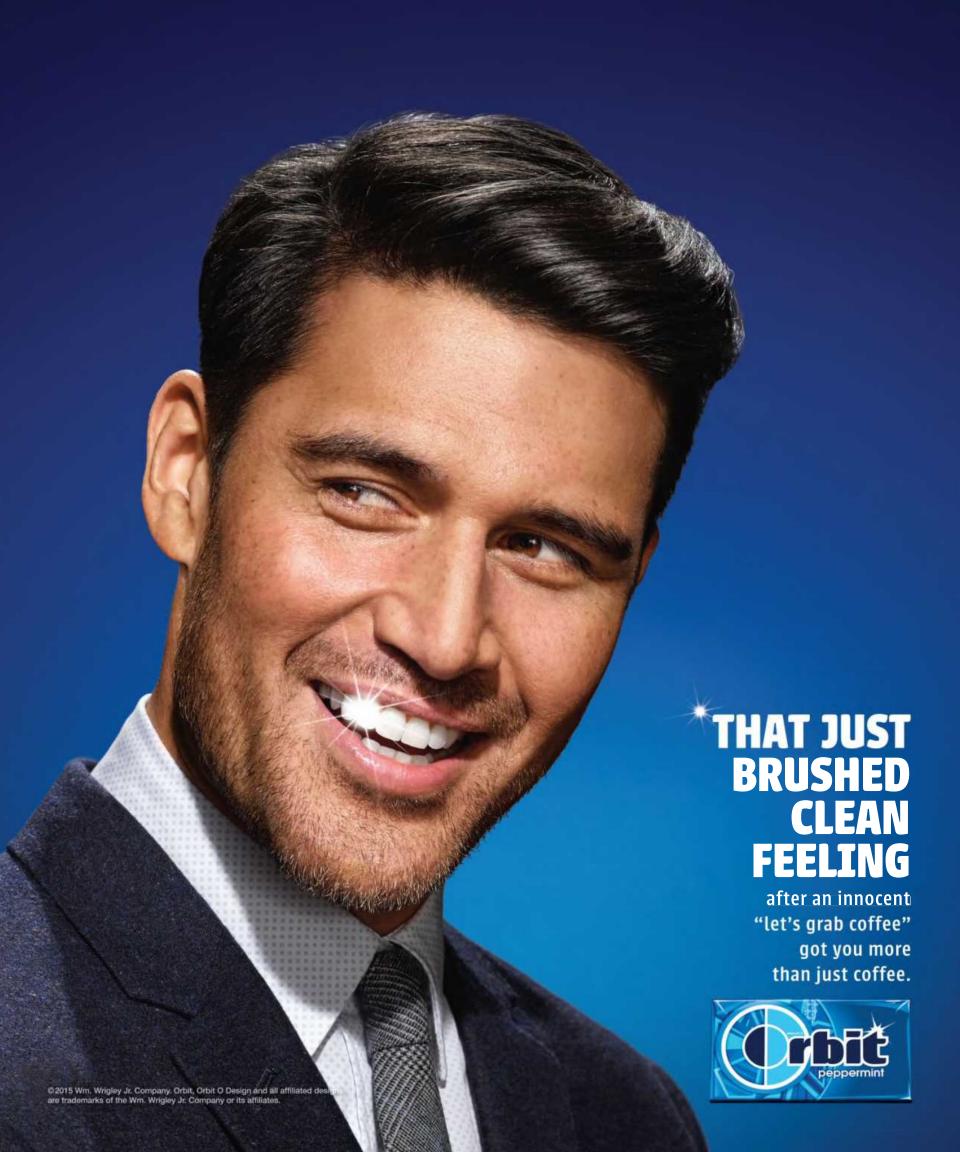
Finally, the decision. There will be no timeout. "I got it," he says, his words devoid of emotion. "Just play goal-line."

Patricia signals the call. Boyer barks into his headset that he wants Butler in the game in the Patriots' goal-line defense. More seconds bleed off the clock. The noise in University of Phoenix Stadium is deafening.

The rookie cornerback, the former Popeyes dishwasher, sprints onto the field and takes his position next to Browner as Seattle breaks its huddle.

**SCENE VII** How do you calculate the probability of a sports miracle? There is a beauty to viewing our games through the lens of science and statistics, in attempting to explain or predict outcomes with numbers. When the Seahawks come to the line of scrimmage with 26 seconds left, they have an 84.4 percent chance of winning, according to win probability analytics. But sports needs alchemy as much as science to be properly understood. There are too many variables, too many what-ifs, to ever truly know what will happen next: if Malcolm Butler hadn't been kicked off his junior college team and forced to get a job at a fast-food restaurant that motivated him to train harder to make the NFL; if he'd run a faster 40 time and been drafted by another team; if Adams had told the Patriots to study different plays in the week prior to the Super Bowl; if Hightower hadn't tackled the NFL's best runner using only an injured shoulder; if Belichick had called a timeout and Boyer had decided to keep Arrington in the game; so much might be different.

Instead, Butler breaks toward the ball, wedges himself in front of Ricardo Lockette and writes a big piece of NFL history.





THE BIG IDEA

# THE HACKERS ARE COMING, AND SPORTS IS COMPLETELY UNPREPARED.

This summer the FBI began investigating the St. Louis Cardinals for their hack of the Astros' proprietary database—the first known team-on-team hack in sports history. And while no indictments have been issued, the incident suggests that firewalls of pro sports teams are less than fireproof. To see how hackable those systems are, we turned to Clint Emerson, founder of Escape the Wolf, which performs "stress tests" on the cyber networks of multinational corporations, government agencies and sports teams. Here is Emerson's take on how hackers can get in and the dirty deeds they can do.

BY CLINT EMERSON, AS TOLD TO PAUL KIX



#### HACKERS GONNA HACK, AND HERE'S HOW THEY'LL DO IT...

#### PHISHING CAMPAIGNS PREYING ON CLUELESS C-SUITERS

We did a phishing email campaign with a company that employs 1,000 people. Twenty-five percent of them clicked on the phishing email—and the email literally said, "This is fake." Still, 25 percent of that 25 percent actually put in a username and password. The C-suite folks are most guilty of this. They don't pay a lot of attention. Or worse: Their executive assistants are pretty much doing everything for them, and the executive assistants are just trying to get through the day. That happens with every kind of company we test.

#### **PICKING ON A VENDOR**

You talk about a stadium—holy crap. How many people, contracted vendors, you name 'em, are coming in and out daily? Or leveraging an Oracle-like network in order to submit invoices, vouchers, inventories—all of these vendors have access in some form or fashion to the team. A lot of your bad guys are not going, "OK, how do I attack this company?" It's "What vendors have access to that company? OK, we want consumer information at the concession stands." And then they use it as a launching pad, right? I'm going to go, "Oh, OK, well I know the nacho cheese company has access." Because they have to submit invoices online. So if I send them an email with a team handle, saying, "Hey, we're having issues with our accounts payable; we want to ensure that your username and password work"-of course vendors are going to make sure it works, because they want to get paid. And then, about two to three



weeks later, you hear about the Patriots getting hacked and all their money getting taken.

#### ATTACKS THROUGH STADIUM WI-FI

The easiest way is what's called "man in the middle operations." Man in the middle is just that: I go to the store, buy a \$50 battery-operated router, stick it in my backpack and go to the game. Since I've been to the game a bunch of times. I know that when I look on my phone and I see all the Wi-Fi options, the public one, the private ones, I can see what they're named. So I'm going to go ahead and name mine exactly the same as whichever Wi-Fi I want to target, then I sit as close as I can to the people who would be on that. What's the first thing you do when you turn on your Wi-Fi? You look for the strongest signal. Strongest signal goes to the top of the list; you're going to glance at it, you're going to click on it and then I own you. I can track whichever sites you visit, whatever emails you respond to, and I can begin to glean your personal information. Because you logged into your secure Wi-Fi before, correct? Now your phone is going to remember that, so that when you click on that Wi-Fi again it's not going to ask you for a password. It never does, because you've logged into it a hundred times prior.

# AND THE NOT-COOL THINGS THEY CAN DO ...

#### SEIZE FINANCIAL RECORDS

Going after your business operations—now, that would be your smart kind of hacker. Very quickly

from a third-party vendor you could get to team financials, player financial data. All the vendor and partner financial data, the unions, agencies, sporting goods companies, the team shops, the pro shops and the concession stands—it's endless from the business operations side how much stuff could be exploited. Teams could lose millions of dollars.

#### **UNLEASH SHEER TERROR**

Following a sports-related hack, a lot would be lost in the pro shop and the concessions and attendance at a game—and I don't think it would be insignificant. But imagine if an organization was being hacked and being targeted by ISIS? And that's not exactly a hypothetical: FC Barcelona's Twitter account was taken over by pro-Assad Syrian hackers temporarily. And what does that mean in the physical world? Does that mean they're planning an attack on that stadium? Suddenly, the threat of that hack reaches far more than just the bottom line.

#### ACCESS PLAYER MEDICAL RECORDS

Hell, let's just consider player medical records. Imagine what kind of digital hostage or ransom demand I could have if I knew just one player was HIV-positive and I leveraged that? Medical records are two to three times more valuable than consumer records and financial records. Not only do they have all the pertinent financial information, they have a history of your entire physical being. And teams have spent millions of dollars to keep that information quiet. If one guy has herpes, this would have real value to a hacker. To approach Player X privately and say, "Does your wife know you have herpes?" That's an extortion play right there. Or you could go to the gossip

sites: A hacker could leverage what he knows to TMZ, and it's all about money. And it automatically has value.

#### SPREAD A DREADED VIRUS

A hacker could load a malicious virus and use this malware to look for other vulnerabilities within the network. And hackers can make themselves look like administrators. There was a stat from the FBI that the Chinese hackers are inside American servers for up to four years before anyone notices. Four years. Without you noticing. Do you know the sheer amount of information you can gather in those four years? Now imagine the insinuations of extortion that information could yield. Whatever is on a team's server—from financial data to medical data to email addresses—is up for grabs.

#### HACK THE GAME ITSELF

Anything that's networked into a system can be hacked: communication, scoreboard, lighting, the big digital screens. All of a sudden the lighting is lowered—or you have porn on the big screen.

#### AND JUST BASICALLY COST TEAMS A WHOLE LOT OF MONEY

If you look at Sony, all that really went on there was a bunch of emails that gave up Hollywood drama—and it ended up costing Sony around \$300 million. These branding hacks have big price tags on the forensics and other costs of subsequent criminal investigations. There's a reason the most popular kind of insurance today is cyber; they're the most detailed policies that underwriters put together. Insurance is a big, big deal now—because hacking is a big, big deal now.

ILLUSTRATION BY KYLE HILTON 12.21.2015 ESPN 61



THE BIG IDEA

# THE NBA-AND ITS FUTURE-BELONGS TO STEPHEN GURRY.

#### **INTERVIEW BY SAM ALIPOUR**

PHOTOGRAPH BY DYLAN COULTER

THE MAG: Who's having as much fun as you guys right now? It's a short list, but Taylor Swift is probably on it.

**STEPHEN CURRY:** Taylor Swift and my Carolina Panthers, another unbeaten.

## For us commoners, how would you describe what it's like to be in the zone that the Warriors are currently in?

The game is slow. It just feels so comfortable, smooth, natural. It's the confidence that, when we're out on the floor, only good things are gonna happen. Any move you wanna make, it happens. You'll miss shots, but there's a flow to everything you do. It's cool. I'm on cloud nine.

#### Be honest. Did you see this coming?

[Pause] Not this. I mean, I expected to be a pretty good NBA point guard and hopefully win a championship. But MVP and all this stuff? Not really. I never looked at my mantel and envisioned an MVP trophy sitting there. This is pretty crazy.

#### Are you the best player in the world?

When I'm on the floor, I believe I am, for sure. I don't get into why I'm better than such and such. But that's my motivation when I work.

#### It's you and LeBron in a toss-up right now.

That motivates me. But if I took a vote of the nation and they say I finished second, I wouldn't be, like, disappointed. It's a pretty cool conversation to have.

And to think that exactly two years ago, you and I were wondering whether you'd get snubbed again for an All-Star selection.
Hah. I remember.

For an encore to your MVP campaign, you're giving us a season that by analytical measure would be an all-timer. What did you work on this summer that enabled you to elevate your game to another level?

The overall theme was to get better at the things I do well and try to add more explosiveness to it. For me, that doesn't mean vertical, it means creating space,



being in the best shape I can be so I can run circles around guys on the floor. But the drills I do are pretty much what I've been working on these past three or four years: like this drill where I wear goggles with flashing lights that obstruct my vision [while dribbling and passing]. Weird, random stuff. Those kinds of sensory distractions are variables that take my mind off the ball and sharpen the brain, helping me neurologically. All of that stuff helps me slow the game down. A recent addition to your regimen is floating. You're among several Warriors who now regularly spend one-hour sessions

It's an opportunity to relax, for one. And it obviously has some physical benefits as well, with [the magnesium in] the salt, being able to relax those sore muscles. But to get away from the demands and all the stimuli we have in the world and in our lives, that was the main draw. When I get in the tank, I lean back, try to take a couple of deep breaths, ground myself and commence the floating. Then it's just me and my thoughts for an hour.

floating in water with 1,000 pounds of Epsom salt inside sensory-deprivation tanks. What does that do for you?

#### You recently tweeted with glee about a new automated toilet that your wife, Ayesha, bought for you. How big of a role has that hole played in your season?

Oh, man, that toilet just makes me happy in life. And when you're happy, you play better. I bet if I did a case study on my performance since I got the toilet, you'd see the difference.

#### Sounds exciting. Were you on the new pot when you posted that tweet?

Well, I am a big social-media-on-thetoilet guy because that's my break time. But no, I was in Minnesota when Ayesha told me about it. And the next day I had 46 [points]. There's a reason for that. I was very happy.

#### You're doing everything better, across the board. What's been the biggest key to your game in the early going?

Somebody told me I'm right behind DeAndre Jordan for field goal percentage in the paint, which is pretty crazy. So probably finishing in the lane. Doesn't

# "Eventually everybody's going to be a point guard, a point forward. Of course, we'll backtrack when the next big man comes along."

quite make sense when you think about the way I play, but that's a good balance to have with as many 3s as I shoot and as much as I'm handling around the perimeter. To be able to finish opportunities that I do get in the paint, that makes a difference. You're shooting with higher volume and efficiency from 8 feet or less, while also getting to the line more. What's been the difference? I'm stronger, I'm not thinking about my ankles anymore and I'm a better surveyor of the floor, knowing when's the right time to attack, or when to settle for a 3-that's not the right word, "settle," but yeah, settling for a 3 when I find a good look.

#### You once told me that when you're at your best, your game would most resemble Steve Nash's. Now he's on the Warriors' staff. What's the best piece of advice he has given you?

One thing he has taught me is that you always have an out. In pick-and-roll situations, when you're the decision maker, you always have an out. He also encourages me to play at our own pace. You can play fast but not in a hurry. As a point guard, I can dictate that.

#### Has he taught you anything about shooting, or should you be teaching him?

[Laughs] He's very complimentary of my stroke. There's not much he can teach me there, which is kind of crazy, because that's the guy I watched the most film on. But his style of play, being able to balance shooting and playmaking, I cater to that, for sure. He made the way we play popular.

#### Today you can do most of what Nash could do, plus get to the line and shoot from everywhere. Are you now at the peak of your powers?

No. I can get better. Turnovers are not out of control, but I still get mad at myself when I make a dumb pass. For me, over the course of 82 games, my goal is to be in the 50/40/90 club. That's been a goal of mine as the ultimate level of efficiency and consistency. I want that mark.

#### How are these Warriors even better than last year's squad?

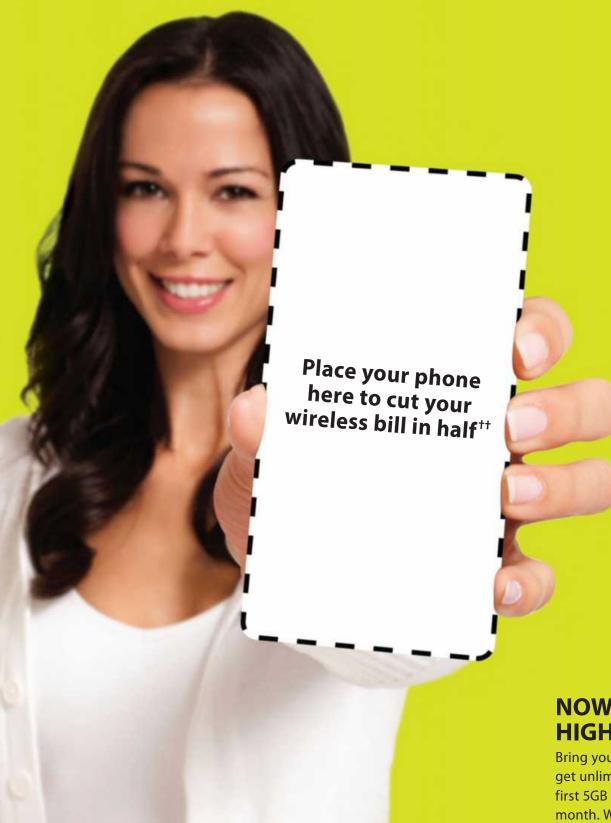
Individually, everybody's taken their game up a notch. As a team, it's chemistry. Our core has been together for four years, five years for some. And we're in our second year in Coach [Steve] Kerr's system, which he always said is when you get your bearings, not just the playcalls but the principles, the fundaments of how to get our shots, how to play up-tempo, how to defend. It's innate now. We've learned how to win games in all sorts of ways. We play with a lot of confidence and flair, but I think we're a humble team. We know we can get better.

#### Nash ran the NBA's best small-ball offense with the Suns. What has he taught you guys about their strengths or shortcomings that helps you navigate your own smallball squad?

One thing he said was that they had so many calls and reads, he could just give a look and they knew what he was going to do. Leandro Barbosa was on that team, and Steve would give LB or Amar'e a head nod, throw them the ball in transition, and they knew where he was going to cut and what he wanted out of the possession. There's also reading each other's spacing on the floor. We've added a lot of that. I bet you 60 percent of the time now we don't call plays. We get the ball in transition and go. It usually works.

#### In what ways have you tweaked or improved upon what the Suns built?

We have a lot more guys with the ball in their hands, making plays. With the Suns, a lot of it was centered on Steve. You get spacing around him and let him make the



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decisions, push the tempo, find the open guy, and he was obviously the best at it. But ours has more player movement. I give it up, move to the corner, set a couple of screens for guys, maybe get it back, or Draymond puts it on the floor, gets to the paint, makes a play. We have so many guys who can be playmakers. It's so hard to guard.

Unlike those Suns, your best small-ball lineup has you, Klay Thompson, Harrison Barnes, Andre Iguodala and Draymond Green—all guys who can shoot, distribute, switch and suffocate. It's been called the Death Lineup. What do you call it?

I call it the Uh-Oh Lineup. I know when I get in with that lineup, something good's about to happen. I have so many different options. That lineup, in one word, is about versatility. Everybody can do everything.

# How can a team foil it? If you were drawing up a game plan, how would you defend that lineup?

Good luck. If you try to take stuff away, there's always a counter, always another way to get a shot. You face our small-ball lineup, you're gonna have a long night. On Nov. 19, the Clippers overplayed the pass, especially that midlevel entry,

pass, especially that midlevel entry, and forced 19 turnovers, seven by you. Is that the ticket?

Yeah, if we turn the ball over, especially against certain athletic teams, that's our nemesis. When we have games like we did against the Lakers for win 16, where we had only eight or nine turnovers, we're unstoppable.

# You've become so deadly when drawing the defenders. You're patiently baiting, then it's two passes for the open shot.

And I'm willing to give it up. It's not in my nature to dominate the ball and make every play. I trust every guy on my team, especially the guys in our smallball lineup, and that feeds everybody's confidence.

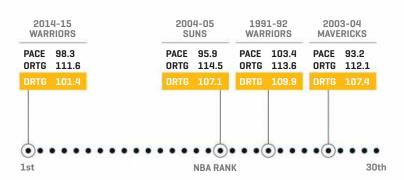
As for pace of play, the league is catching up to the Warriors, who led the NBA in pace last season [98.3 possessions per game, 1.8 more than any other team]. Your Dubs rank fourth this season, even though you've upped the pace to 99.1. Can your

#### **WINNING BIG BY GOING SMALL**

Entering the 2014-15 season, small ball was deemed a gimmick. Sure, teams that used it engineered solid regular-season results. Still, the knock remained: It can't win when it matters. That was, until Steph Curry & Co. enhanced it in two critical ways. —JORDAN BRENNER

#### RUN'N'... DEFEND

Going small has traditionally meant sacrificing defense to outgun an opponent: Three of the best smallball lineups (right) ranked in the top three in both pace and offense. But the Dubs' 2015-16 small-ball lineup (Curry, Thompson, Barnes, Iguodala and Green) had allowed an absurdly low 84.8 points per 100 possessions (NBA average: 103.8) through 19 games. The key is Green. Small-ball bigs are usually scorers who exploit mismatches against lumbering bigs (think Dirk Nowitzki). But at 6-7, Green still holds his own down low and is one of the best at help D.



#### HERE'S THE POINT ...

In Game 6 of June's NBA Finals Steve Kerr turned to a lineup with no one taller than 6-7. Why so small? Because so many versatile playmakers made it nearly impossible for the Cavs' D to key on any single aspect of the Warriors' offense. Four members of their crunch-time lineup were primary ball handlers at some point in their careers (Thompson being the exception), and all five had an assist percentage above 10 percent in the regular season. Sure. having the best-shooting backcourt in NBA history helps, but Curry and Thompson are even more effective because so many of their teammates create shots for them.

	AST %	CAREER- HIGH AST %	SEASON RECORD
Tim Hardaway	33.3%	42.8%	
Sarunas Marciulionis	16.0%	19.5%	
Chris Mullin	12.2%	22.8%	
Billy Owens	9.8%	18.0%	
Tyrone Hill	3.1%	6.8%	Lost in first round of playoffs
Steve Nash	38.3%	53.1%	TO OO
Michael Finley	11.7%	22.7%	<b>   -  </b>
Josh Howard	8.8%	10.6%	
Antoine Walker	19.4%	26.8%	
Dirk Nowitzki	11.3%	17.8%	Lost in first round of playoffs
Steve Nash Joe Johnson Quentin Richardson Shawn Marion	49.2% 13.2% 7.9% 7.5%	53.1% 29.1% 11.4%	62-20
Joe Johnson	13.2%	29.1%	Lost in Western Conferen
Joe Johnson Quentin Richardson Shawn Marion	13.2% 7.9% 7.5%	29.1% 11.4% 13.1%	
Joe Johnson Quentin Richardson Shawn Marion Amar'e Stoudemire	13.2% 7.9% 7.5% 7.7%	29.1% 11.4% 13.1% 13.2%	Lost in Western Conferentinals
Joe Johnson Quentin Richardson Shawn Marion Amar'e Stoudemire Stephen Curry	13.2% 7.9% 7.5% 7.7%	29.1% 11.4% 13.1% 13.2%	
Joe Johnson Quentin Richardson Shawn Marion Amar'e Stoudemire Stephen Curry Klay Thompson	13.2% 7.9% 7.5% 7.7% 38.6% 14.6%	29.1% 11.4% 13.1% 13.2% 39.9%	

2016 Panelists

**BILLY BEANE GARY BETTMAN BILL JAMES MICHAEL LEWIS** 

**NATE SILVER** 

**ADAM SILVER** 





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#### style of small ball be replicated?

You can try to copy it, but you won't have the personnel. There isn't another Draymond Green, another Klay, another Andre. If you put your small-ball lineup next to ours, we like our chances.

The NBA has reached a sort of singularity a sudden and steep climb in at least the philosophical evolution of the game with the arrival of small ball, corner 3s, all the corresponding positional evolutions across the floor. What's next?

Eventually everybody's going to be a point guard, a point forward. You're seeing it in AAU ball now—kids growing up, everybody wants to play point, which is fun. Of course, we'll backtrack when the next big man comes along and sparks a shift, and then we'll copy that.

#### Do you want 34 [the Lakers won 33 straight games in the 1971-72 season]?

Why not? It'd be an amazing accomplishment. On that same note, we don't want to fast-forward. Just like this start, nobody thought about it until the 12th game. There's so much in between.

#### Do you want 73 [the Bulls went 72-10 in the 1995-96 season]?

Yeah, but we have to do it the right way. We want to keep getting better and be at our best come April. If we don't win the championship, what good is 73?

# Kerr's 72-win Bulls vs. his Warriors. Your coach has said he enjoys engaging in the debate. Ever let your mind go there?

It's hard to compare the teams. I watched them play growing up, but Coach Kerr knows what Jordan and Pippen were like, and even he says it's an impossible debate. Maybe me and Ron Harper should lock ourselves in a room and talk it out. Kerr wouldn't ID the victor, but he felt it would come down to the last possession. You got the rock, MJ's on you, one play to win it all. What happens next?

Right to left, step back. I knock it down. You also draw comparisons to the Showtime Lakers. Magic Johnson believes a driving force in their domination in the '80s was, oddly, hate. They hated their rivals, and the feeling among the Celtics and Pistons was mutual. He said that today's NBA doesn't have enough hate and that hate is, in fact,

#### WITNESSING HISTORY

94

Threes made by Curry through 19 games, a pace of 406 over 82 games, which would break his record by 120.

**22** 

Projected win shares for Curry, which would be the highest season total since Kareem Abdul-Jabbar in 1971-72.

STATS THROUGH NOV. 30.

# a strategic advantage. How do you feel about that? [Pause] I ... sort of agree with that.

Obviously, there are certain teams we have history with that we love to beat, that keep us on our toes because you know it's going to be a grueling, physical battle. It's pretty self-explanatory what team I'm talking about [laughs].

Sure is. So you don't hate the Clippers?

We don't hate them, but we love to beat them. It feels good to beat a team like that, with the history behind it. It's not white and black. We respect them.

They are a talented team. They keep us

#### Seems to me you guys are driven more by joy than hate.

sharp, focused. They give us an edge.

We feed off that.

That's what I was going to say. That's why I said that I "sort of agree" with Magic. For us, it's about what we are doing, not who we are playing against. When we're having fun, playing the game the way we wanna play it, that is the key to our team. For us, fun produces wins, which in turn is fun.

With a lot of champs, the biggest obstacle to repeating is internal. Not to get all Zen Master on you, but that was one of the tenets of Phil Jackson's coaching: Champs stay the champs by quieting the chatter in your mind, quelling the ego.

Man, sounds like Coach Kerr.

#### A branch on Phil's tree, right? In the case of the Warriors, maybe it's Klay wishing to be an alpha, Harrison wanting more shots or money. Is that a concern for you?

We're very mindful of that. I know the big difference between this year and last year is that everybody's in a different place in their career. HB is in contract extension talks. Draymond has a new deal, so he's set for the next four years, so he has different motivations. But at the same time, what hasn't changed, and the beauty of our team, is the sacrifices people are making for the greater good. The way Andre accepted his [sixth man] role is us in a nutshell. Now, look how [Andrew] Bogut and Festus [Ezeli] start in one game, then don't start the next but still play the same way, not letting it bother them. I like to say

we're lucky to have each other.

## Mindfulness seems to be a recurring theme with you. It also happens to be one of Kerr's four core values for the team.

Mindfulness, joy, compassion, competitiveness. And they are all related. So as far as leadership, I might talk a lot more than I used to, but I'm more observant now. I'm not the loudest guy on the team or the most frequent voice you hear, but I'm trying to be more observant and purposeful in the sense that when I talk, there is a reason.

#### In the past, when I asked you about winning a scoring title someday, you'd laugh and say it's hard for a point guard. Still funny?

There are a bunch of point guards in the top five now. We're changing the game. But I didn't come into the season thinking I'll top the scoring chart—it's just that I have so much confidence, and it's coming in the flow. But a scoring title isn't a goal for me. On a game-togame basis, my scoring isn't important for a win. Sometimes I don't need to score 30. Sometimes I do. Sometimes it just happens.

# Is going down as the GOAT in your mind's eye, or do you just go in conceding that title due to the presence of one Michael Jordan?

It's a high mountain to climb, but I'm pretty motivated to take on the challenge. Whatever that means, however you got on that mountain, why not try to climb it? And do it in your own way.

#### So you are trying to top MJ on the NBA mountain?

Yeah. Why else would I be playing? You want to be the best you can be. And if the best you can be is better than him, then why not? That's good motivation.

#### Final question: How long until Baby Riley is our president?

[Laughs] As soon as she's eligible. Her platform will be more cookies for everybody, plus free Whip/Nae Nae instructions. And everybody would be required to know, word for word, the lines to that Disney movie Descendants. That would be the pledge of allegiance, or maybe the national anthem. I'd vote for her, especially if Kanye's on the ticket. It'd be a fun country.



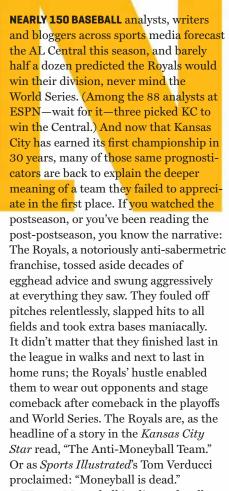




THE BIG IDEA

## THE NEW MONEYBALL IS HERE.

BY PETER KEATING



Wrong. Moneyball is alive and well, and Kansas City has quietly become one of the smartest organizations in baseball. As a result, the Royals have plenty to teach other MLB teams. It's just that the lessons are different from what most people have been talking about.

**LET'S START BY** clearing away some persistent misconceptions. Contrary to popular belief, the Royals did not have a good offense in 2015. It's not just that they didn't hit for power or draw many walks. Even some of KC's supposedly signature characteristics are mirages, seemingly obvious in the glare of a few postseason games, but unsustainable. It turns out, for example, that Royals hitters were actually below average this season in foul balls as a percentage of total pitches. As for baserunning, yes, Royals runners were aggressive but not particularly productive. Overall, KC lost a net 3.5 runs on the bases this season, according to UBR (ultimate baserunning), a comprehensive stat developed by sabermetrician Mitchel Lichtman.

The bottom line: Despite all the talk about the Royals' old-school, go-for-broke offense, Kansas City scored 724 runs this year, just 14 more than the AL average. And it's scoring—not contact or aggressiveness or intangibles—that wins games. Even if we credit the Royals for smart or timely hitting (and we should—they scored 32 percent of their runners who reached base, the fourth-highest rate in MLB), their offense simply wasn't championship level.

Their pitching wasn't so hot either. KC starters ranked 12th in the AL with a 4.32 FIP, a measure designed to separate pitching performance from defense and scaled to resemble ERA. As a staff, the Royals ranked sixth in the AL with a 4.04 FIP, behind teams such as the Indians, White Sox and Rays—none of whom won more than 81 games.

**SO WITH ALL** those decidedly average stats, exactly how did Kansas City win the World Series? By assembling undervalued players to form a devastating weapon: defense.

Over the past two seasons, Royals fielders produced 96 defensive runs saved, good for almost 10 wins. No other AL team had more than 50 DRS. Their defense has sustained the team's World Series campaigns, from the 2014 season, when the Royals ranked just ninth in the AL in runs scored, through this one, when the team's hitting improved but its pitching declined.

The club's defensive prowess is no accident. In fact, it's what the Royals have been working toward for almost a decade. When owner David Glass hired Dayton Moore as GM in 2006, Moore told him: "We want an above-average defender at every single position."

Moore, a traditionalist, knew defense had value in the Royals' roomy ballpark and was a link to the great George BrettAmos Otis-Willie Wilson teams of the late 1970s and early '80s. About five years ago, Moore and his lieutenants realized they had tapped into a serious market inefficiency—though they might not have worded it that way—and have been mining it ever since.

In 2010, speedy outfielder Jarrod Dyson (who was selected in the 50th round of the 2006 draft) played his first game for the Royals and Jose Guillen his last. Alex Gordon moved from third base to left field, clearing the way for Mike Moustakas the following year. And when the Royals traded Zack Greinke, a homegrown-yet-soon-to-beunaffordable ace, they acquired center fielder Lorenzo Cain and shortstop Alcides Escobar. At the time, other teams didn't regard KC's haul that highly, but Cain and Escobar were both young, cheap and, as Moore noted after the deal, superior defenders.

"We didn't expect returns, necessarily, right away," he told *The New York Times* last year. "But with another 1,000 at-bats or so, we felt we could have some well-rounded players, with plus-defense being the commonality."

There were still bumps ahead. It has taken Moore almost a decade to overcome his affection for replacementlevel retreads like Yuniesky Betancourt and Jeff Francoeur. But as Kansas City built an impressive team of analytics researchers and integrated its work into the team's scouting and decisionmaking, the Royals moved ahead of the curve in evaluating fielding. They have drafted and developed players for defense. And by targeting athletes who fit their vision but are undervalued by other teams, they have assembled a title-winning roster with a belowaverage payroll.

That's as Moneyball as it gets. And value-hunting, KC-style, offers areas for prospecting in each phase of the game.

**FOR STARTING PITCHERS,** to a surprising extent, it's about defense. Kauffman Stadium's distant fences (330 feet down the lines, 410 to center field) and vast

gaps cut home runs by about 15 percent a year while boosting doubles and triples. The Royals' long rebuilding effort really took shape when the team started stocking up on outfielders who could cover the wide terrain of their home field. Cain led all MLB outfielders in putouts plus assists per game this season, while Gordon ranked second among left fielders and Alex Rios third in right field.

With athletes like that on patrol, KC had the confidence to acquire James Shields and Johnny Cueto, who give up a lot of fly balls. Just as important, the Royals have zeroed in on fly ball pitchers with rocky tenures, like Jeremy Guthrie, Jason Vargas and Chris Young, and signed them on the cheap knowing they would benefit from a big ballpark and rangy outfielders. In the end, those plays made in the field helped the Royals register an ERA 31 percentage points better than their FIP—the second-biggest gap in MLB this year.

FOR RELIEVERS, IT'S about times through the batting order. With reclamation projects filling their rotation for most of the 2015 season, the Royals could not count on dominance from their starters, who threw only 912% innings, the fewest in the AL. But Kansas City has developed an extremely deep and effective bullpen by reaching even further for castoffs, bringing each in to throw his best pitch for strikes and then yanking him before he suffers the drop in effectiveness that pitchers incur when they face opposing batters more than once.

Wade Davis is a prime example: Ineffective as a starter using five pitches, he almost completely stopped throwing sliders in 2013 and changeups in 2014, added 3 mph to his fastball and cutter, and has become one of the game's most dominant relievers. Similarly, in 2013 Luke Hochevar cut his use of sinkers, sliders and changeups from 32.4 percent of his pitches to 7.3 percent, according to PITCHf/x, and increased his reliance on his cutter (9.9 percent to

### THEY GOT YOUR BACK



Difference in percentage points between KC's 2015 ERA and FIP, thanks to the D behind the staff.

### GLOVE STORY



Wins added by the Royals' defensive runs saved over the past two seasons, the highest total in MLB by far.

### CATCH AS CATCH CAN



Percentage of fly balls given up by KC pitchers that turned into home runs at home in '15, lowest in the AL. 36.8 percent). He too added 3 mph to his fastball. Same story with Ryan Madson and Franklin Morales: fewer changeups, more fastballs (cutters for the former, two-seamers for the latter). And the results—and value—have been astounding. The Royals' top seven relievers this year included three former starters and two guys who didn't even pitch in 2014. Cumulatively, they posted a 2.59 ERA.

FOR HITTERS, WELL, it's still about on-base percentage. A team filled with good defensive players who don't walk or hit home runs, such as the Royals, just wouldn't score enough runs to stay competitive if they didn't hit for average. So while focusing on defense, Kansas City has taken care to develop athletes who smack line drives. As a result, KC had the third-highest batting average in the AL this year (.269). Five Royals who played at least part time (250 or more plate appearances) had an OBP of .360 or better, tied for the most of any team since 2010. That's where contact hitting matters: when a hit is as good as a walk.

MLB'S SHARPER TEAMS are already catching up with the Royals' approach. Jason Heyward, who sports a .268 career batting average, is set to snag one of this winter's richest free agent deals, in part due to defensive stats that mark him as one of the very best corner outfielders in baseball. And as organizations improve their understanding of player value, it will be harder to exploit old market gaps.

"For a little while, defense might have been one of those inefficiencies," Pirates GM Neal Huntington recently said. "Now ... it's being valued more than in the past."

Eventually, though, overspending by other clubs will give the Royals—if they stay shrewd—new chances for bargain shopping. Championship teams make successful investing look like destiny. Dynasties never stop searching for the next place to make their bet.

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THE BIG IDEA

BY RAMONA SHELBURNE AND TIM MACMAHON
ILLUSTRATIONS BY RAFA ALVAREZ

If the offseason pursuit of free agent center DeAndre Jordan taught us anything, it's this: A deal is not a deal if a roomful of buddies, some bags of takeout and a few goofy tweets can derail it.

The saga begins just after breakfast in DeAndre Jordan's Pacific Palisades home as Mavericks owner Mark Cuban makes his final pitch to the man he hopes will anchor his team for the next four years: You'll have a larger role in the offense. You can be the best center in basketball. It's Friday, July 3, six days before the end of the NBA's 2015-16 free agent moratorium, and Cuban is walking with Jordan around the backyard. "If what you're telling me is what you want, I will do my best to get you there," Cuban says. Jordan pauses, then delivers his verdict. "I love that. I'm going to Dallas." The group makes a toast. "They all had tequila," Cuban says later. "I had vodka. It was still morning."



### 2 BAD AT FREE THROWS, WORSE AT DECISIONS ...

Two days later, after verbally committing to a four-year, \$80 million deal with the Mavs, Jordan is back home in Houston, working on free throws with his childhood coach, John Lucas. Jordan doesn't say much; he doesn't have to. "A lot can be said without saying a word," Lucas says. Uncertainty is setting in. Lucas asks Jordan, a guy he has known for 12 years and knows is notoriously impressionable, to answer one question: Did he say yes to Dallas for himself—or to please others?



### 3 I'D LIKE TO PHONE A FRIEND ...

By the time Lucas tweets a photo of Jordan in the process of making 1,000 free throws, Jordan is on the phone with Clippers teammate and good friend Blake Griffin, telling him he's having misgivings about his decision to leave. The excitement of being recruited having worn off, he's questioning whether he'd simply gotten caught up in the process. I've built a life in LA. Do I really want to be the face of a franchise? Griffin tells Jordan he's made a commitment and needs to honor it and that they'll still be friends, even if they aren't teammates. But Jordan still seems unsettled.



### **4** CUBAN GETS A LITTLE ANTSY

By the next day, news is spreading. Cuban gets word of Jordan's uneasiness and immediately calls Chandler Parsons, a Mavs forward who's been a major part of Jordan's summertime recruitment. They hatch a plan: Parsons will fly to LA on Wednesday, the final day of the moratorium, in case Jordan returns there. Cuban will fly to Houston on Tuesday night. "I drove by his house on Tuesday night and no one answered," Cuban would say later. "He texted me saying he was on a date. I was like, 'Hit me up when you're ready.' That's how we left it at 11:43 p.m." Cuban then returns to the Westin Galleria hotel in Houston to await word from Jordan that will never come.



### **5** RELEASE THE EMOJIS!

While Cuban waits, Jordan is out with Griffin and has invited Clips coach Doc Rivers, owner Steve Ballmer, Chris Paul, J.J. Redick and Paul Pierce to join them at his house the next day. By the time ESPN's Marc Stein breaks the news of Jordan's change of heart, Rivers, Ballmer and Pierce are on their way to Houston; Redick is driving there from his offseason home in Austin; Paul is en route; Griffin is already there. So when Parsons tweets an emoji of a plane at 1:02 p.m.—signaling he's flying in to salvage the Mavs' effort—the Clippers are happy to play along. Redick tweets an emoji of a car. Paul tweets a banana and a boat. Griffin tries to throw everyone off by tweeting he's in Kauai. Pierce? A rocket ship. The Great Emoji War of 2015 has begun.



### 6 MOM'S GOT FOOD!

With the Clippers clan now inside Jordan's Houston mansion, Jordan's mom, Kimberly Jordan-Williams, picks up dinner for the team: bags of chicken from local fast-food joint Raising Cane's. Jordan-Williams had spoken with Rivers two days prior, on Monday, after Jordan's initial conversation with Griffin, to see whether her son's verbal commitment to Dallas had burned his bridge back to LA. She'd also voiced her displeasure at the Clippers' initial pitch to keep him [which included little about Jordan's role and more about the team's effort to get him more All-Star votes from China]. Doc says that no bridges have been burned and asks for a second chance.



### **7** THE NO-LOCK LOCKDOWN

By midafternoon, Jordan has made his decision to return to LA. Through the remainder of the evening, as fans laugh at the absurdity of the Emoji War and Griffin—in full goofball mode—posting a photo of a chair purportedly blocking Jordan's door from the outside world, the atmosphere inside the house remains calm. Rivers watches summer league games. Ballmer talks about how often this happens in the business world. Redick, Paul, Pierce and Jordan play spades and video games. Jordan-Williams goes out to get more food. All there is to do now is wait until 11 p.m. [midnight ET], when free agents can officially sign with their new [or old] teams.





### 8 CAN WE JUST PRETEND THIS NEVER HAPPENED?

Jordan doesn't respond to most of the Mavericks' attempts to contact him Wednesday, instead spending the day inside his home with the teammates and coaches he'd spurned five days earlier. (The role of Jordan's agent, Dan Fegan—long accused by rival agents of being too cozy with Cuban and the Mavs-remains shrouded in mystery, though after Jordan told him Tuesday night that he wanted to speak with the Clippers again, Fegan did fly to Houston on Wednesday afternoon, then flew back to LA hours later.) At 11:01 p.m., Jordan signs a four-year, \$88 million max deal to return to LA. "Never in a million years did I think I'd have to quarantine the guy," Cuban laments later. Parsons will add: "This is something I've never seen in my career. When a man gives you his word ... It's just very unethical and disrespectful." Griffin, who's been in Houston since Monday, tweets a photo of a tent minutes before Jordan signs and the message: "Alright everybody goodnight!" Emojis 1, Mavericks 0.





Dave (far left) and Rob Gomes won \$1 million on DraftKings.com. But you knew that already.

THE BIG IDEA

# THE FATE OF DAILY FANTASY IS ALL ABOUT THESE BROS.

BY MINA KIMES
PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREW CUTRARO

SITTING ACROSS FROM Dave and Rob Gomes in their mother's Italian restaurant in Boston's North End is a surreal experience. The brothers aren't famous, but they are weirdly familiar, like strangers you see every day at a coffee shop. Sometimes they get recognized. "At bars, it'll happen," says Dave, a cheery 25-year-old with a thick Boston accent and gelled hair parted sharply to one side. He cuts into a wedge of tiramisu. "I'll have people come up to me and be like: 'You're the guy."

In November 2014, the Gomes brothers, who share an apartment in South Boston, won \$1 million playing daily fantasy football on DraftKings.com. The company used the footage from their victory party, which took place at this restaurant, in a series of advertisements. So far this year, they have appeared on television more than 32,000 times, often during the commercial breaks of football games. As the brothers became ubiquitous, they attained meme status—a few people dressed up as them on Halloween, according to Rob, 26—and incurred the wrath of social media.

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF DAILY FANTASY

For a concept not even 7 years old, daily fantasy sports (DFS) has certainly made its mark. But with the state of New York recently deeming it illegal, could the end already be near?

### **MARCH 2009**

The idea for FanDuel is hatched at the SXSW festival. Its first iteration: head-to-head player pick 'em contests. But after an existing user suggests a salary cap format, the current version is born.

### **JULY 2009**

FanDuel officially launches, using a \$50,000 salary cap to form all lineups.

### **APRIL 2012**

DraftKings launches. "There are something like 30 million fantasy sports players," co-founder Matthew Kalish told *The* Boston Globe. "And only 50,000 have tried daily. That's a huge opportunity."

### DECEMBER 2013

FanDuel and DraftKings award their first one-day \$1M prizes, both for fantasy football: FanDuel to Travis Spieth, and DraftKings to James Tran.

Dave pulls out his phone and reads a few tweets. "If I ever meet Dave Gomes, I'm gonna hit him over the head with that oversized check," he says.

"Dave Gomes on DraftKings commercials has easily one of the top 5 most punchable faces ever."

"I see more of Dave Gomes than I do my kids."

"That Gomes guy on the DraftKings commercial looks like every frat douche ever."

Dave, who is studying to become a physician's assistant, shares a glance with Rob. "Accurate," he says. "I was in a frat."

If you watch football, or ESPN, which has an exclusive advertising deal with DraftKings, you've seen the commercial. It starts with the brothers pacing near the bar at the restaurant, Antico Forno, surrounded by a few dozen family members and friends. Rob, who is wearing a backward cap and a throwback Tom Brady jersey, sweats and fidgets and makes a series of increasingly theatrical faces; at one point, he literally spins with anxiety. Dave mostly stares at the television. Then the voice-over hits: "This is what it looks like when real people"dramatic pause—"win a million dollars playing fantasy football."

Dave says DraftKings approached him on the Sunday before they won, once it became clear that he and his brother—the two had entered the contest together under Dave's name—were front-runners for the million-dollar prize. "The day before, our mom was like, 'Stop putting money into that site,'" Rob says. They had drafted lucrative sleepers in the Buccaneers' defense, which squashed struggling quarterback Robert Griffin III, and a little-known Patriots running back

named Jonas Gray. After Gray scored four touchdowns against the Colts that Sunday in Week 11, the brothers surged to first place. But they had to wait and see whether their closest challenger, who selected Steelers running back Le'Veon Bell, would overtake them on Monday night during a matchup between Pittsburgh and Tennessee.

DraftKings, which is also based in Boston (the brothers say they had never met anyone from the company before that Monday), sent a few staffers with cameras to the restaurant. "They told us it was gonna be for a documentary," Dave says. When the Steelers went into victory formation, ensuring that Bell wouldn't score any more points, the party erupted. DraftKings filmed their champagnesoaked celebration. (Not captured on camera: the group moving to the streets, then to a local strip club, which had subbed in its Saturday night lineup in anticipation of the big spenders, according to Dave. Unfortunately, the brothers were broke at the time and couldn't spend their oversized check on the dancers.)

A few months passed. Dave saw the first commercial in March; by the summer, it was everywhere. So far this year, DraftKings has spent \$154 million on commercials that have aired over 46,000 times, up more than 425 percent from 2014; in September, it outspent every advertiser on TV, including its larger rival, FanDuel, according to iSpot.tv. The company repurposed the footage from the Gomes brothers' party for several spots, using it to promote everything from fantasy UFC to fantasy NASCAR.

"Everyone always asks if we got paid for it," Dave says.

"We didn't get a dime," says Rob.

"Well, we got paid," Dave replies.
"We won a million bucks," Rob says.
"I'm not complaining."

Although the two men had been playing fantasy football for years, they were relatively new to the daily version of the game. Dave says he won \$3,500 during his second week on DraftKings; a week later, he won the million-dollar prize. The company couldn't have dreamed up better pitchmen—two brothers, both amateurs, both jockish, camera-friendly guys who didn't look like they spent hours in front of a computer. "Just pick your sport, pick your players and pick up your cash," the commercial said. "That's it. It's the simplest way to win life-changing piles of cash every week." The takeaway was obvious: Anyone, even two average guys from Boston, even you, could win big.

But now, as DraftKings battles regulators who want to ban daily fantasy sports, it must undermine that message. On Nov. 10, New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman ordered DraftKings and FanDuel to shutter their operations in his state, claiming, among other things, that their contests should be classified as gambling because they're contingent on chance. He also wrote in the complaint that the websites' advertisements are misleading, using the Gomes ad-complete with a screenshot of the brothers' mugging faces—as an example of how the companies make winning seem too easy. On Nov. 25, DraftKings and FanDuel recently fired back in court, arguing that skilled players-i.e., not just anyone, and probably not you—dominate their sites.

"There isn't any doubt that a small fraction of players win the vast majority of prizes and do so time after time," said DraftKings lawyer David Boies. "This is

### **NOVEMBER 2014**

DraftKings becomes an official partner of the NHL. Meanwhile, the NBA announces a four-year exclusive deal with FanDuel, which includes equity.

### MADOU 201

Washington Post reporter Adam Kilgore reveals that MLB has an equity position in DraftKings.

### SEPTEMBER 2015

DraftKings manager Ethan Haskell mistakenly posts which NFL players are on the most user rosters. That weekend, he wins \$350K on FanDuel. Dozens of classaction lawsuits are filed against both companies.

### OCTOBER 2015

Nevada Gaming Control Board chairman A.G. Burnett concludes that DFS meets the state's definition of sports wagering and requires a gaming license for daily fantasy companies to operate in Nevada.

### OCTOBER 2015

The NCAA informs
DraftKings and FanDuel
that they will not be allowed
to advertise during the
NCAA men's and women's
basketball tournaments.

### NOVEMBER 2015

New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman sends cease-and-desist letters to both companies. Both file lawsuits in New York Supreme Court to stop him from banning DFS games in the state.

inconsistent with a game of chance." The company cited research showing that a few experts, some of whom use complex mathematical models to assemble unusual lineups, reap most of the site's winnings. It also highlighted the efforts of a million-dollar prizewinner named Peter Jennings, an avid daily fantasy player who reportedly spends up to 90 hours a week doing research. (He also works as a fantasy analyst for ESPN.) "He believes his success is the result of the immense amounts of research and preparation and the sophisticated analysis he has developed over years of playing," the company wrote.

Admittedly, the phrase "immense research and preparation and sophisticated analysis" is a lot less catchy than "Pick your players and pick up your cash."

Dave and Rob Gomes don't use algorithms. They aren't former poker players, and they don't have quantitative expertise. But they do spend over 20 hours a week studying lineup strategies, according to Dave, and sometimes win a few thousand dollars. "We're still learning," Rob says. "We were rookies last year."

After DraftKings wired them their winnings last fall—about \$600,000 after taxes, Dave says—they invested in a condo in South Boston and flew to Arizona for the Super Bowl, winning an additional \$90,000 off a bet they had placed on the Patriots in Las Vegas back in August. After the Super Bowl, they drove to Vegas to pick up their money in person, spending a night walking up and down the Strip with a knapsack full of cash. They stayed in Floyd Mayweather's suite, Dave says. "It was bigger than my house."

The brothers have enjoyed the spoils of microcelebrity. This past summer, they

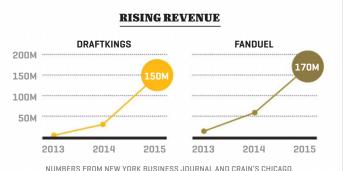
met their beloved Rob Gronkowski at an awards event. Dave says random women on Facebook message him at least once a week—"I have girls hitting me up from crazy states"—and at least one of his solicitors has flown to Boston to meet him. This fall he and Rob started taping a radio show called *The Fantasy Bros*, in which they counsel listeners on setting lineups. The name has a double meaning, explains Dave: "We're bros, and we're bros."

The two men say they haven't seen their commercial in weeks. According to a report in *The Boston Globe*, DraftKings CEO Jason Robins said at a recent conference that DraftKings was changing its advertisements to focus more on the gaming experience and less on "the prizing aspect." Now that the company is arguing that skill plays an integral role in daily fantasy, it's no longer touting how easy it is to win.

Meanwhile, DraftKings has curtailed marketing across the board. In the second week of November, it spent just \$400,000 on commercials, compared with \$13.7 million in the first week of September, according to iSpot.tv. Amid heightened scrutiny, the business is lying low. DraftKings claims in a statement that this was premeditated. "Our strategy on advertising was to have a strong presence in the market for the two weeks prior to the start of the season and the first week of the season. Since then, we've scaled back every week in keeping with that strategy."

The Gomes brothers say that while they enjoyed their brief notoriety, they're happy to recede from the spotlight. "I had so many people texting me: 'I'm sick of your face,'" Dave says.

Rob laughs. "I'm sick of seeing me on TV at this point," he says.



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### **2014 PRIZE MONEY AWARDED**



In 2015, the companies estimate that they will pay out more than \$3 billion in combined prize money.

DRAFTKINGS FIGURE FROM EILER'S RESEARCH LLC; FANDUEL FIGURE FROM FANDUEL.



### TOTAL NUMBER OF TV ADS, 2015\*

46,008 32,113

Math alert! That's 138 DraftKings and 96 FanDuel commercials ... per day.

\*TOTALS AS OF NOV. 30, FROM ISPOT.TV.

THE BIG IDEA

BY KENT RUSSELL

I WILL ADMIT to experiencing a certain glee, watching it unfold. Perhaps you felt similarly. It was a long time coming anyway.

Marshawn Lynch refused to utter one syllable to the media during the 2013 NFL season. Faced with sanctions from the league, he began to answer journalists' questions with repeated words or phrases, variations of "Nope" or "I appreciate it." On Super Bowl media day this past January, he responded to each query with, "I'm just here so I won't get fined." The next day, his rejoinder was, "You know why I'm here." The day after that, though, he had something to say.

"All week, I done told y'all what's up," Lynch explained. "And for some reason, y'all continue to come back and do the same thing that y'all did." He went on to harangue them for 120 seconds or so, a veritable deluge during which Lynch wondered what their *deal* was, just why they kept trying to shuck him open. He laughed a few times and shrugged a lot. He seemed genuinely baffled. He closed by saying, "I done talked—all of my requirements are fulfilled. So now, for this next three minutes, I'll just be looking at y'all, the way y'all looking at me."

It was as if Marshawn Luther had nailed "Thanks for asking" to the door of Old Media. Athletes started refusing to participate in the hoary old ritual. Richard Sherman lectured the media with the help of a cardboard cutout. Serena Williams avowed that talking to them after a match was the last thing she wanted to do. Stephen Curry diverted their attention by holding his darling homunculus of a daughter, as if showcasing what a real, organic thing looked like. Cincinnati Reds manager Bryan Price dropped a cluster of 77 F-bombs on a beat reporter. The Wisconsin men's basketball team ignored everyone after becoming enraptured with



the stenographer's machine, the very machine fabricating the pseudo-event they were taking part in.

The consensus among fans was: Hallelujah. The cracks in the edifice were spreading. In fact, the only people upset by the sudden fracturing of news conference protocol seemed to be the beat reporters themselves. But what, I ask you, is more perfunctory than a postgame news conference? More anachronistic? What is the point of this Kabuki, played out nightly: "Hey X, Y here from the Mudville Z. How did it feel to recover that fumble/rob that home run/hit that buzzer beater/make that sprawling save?" "Well, I was just thrilled, you know. Thrilled to be able to contribute, thrilled and real pleased to be playing the game I love, especially with these teammates and this coach, under the watchful gaze of my Lord and Savior, and also the visiting liaison to my lifestyle-brand partner, Goobers."

Teams have Twitter accounts from which to break news. Athletes have Instagram accounts through which to bare their souls. Derek Jeter even started a Web outlet last year, the Players' Tribune, on which Kobe Bryant recently announced his retirement. Nobody is lacking for a platform. What could possibly be bad about sportspeople telling their own stories, sharing their own views while stonewalling the middlemen who might warp those stories and views, or try to fit them into their own agendas?

And anyway, I thought, this is America. We don't just have a right to our personal narratives—we have a duty to stitch them together, wear them proudly. Me, you, Serena, Marshawn. We're all authoring our selves with the tales we choose to tell, the pictures we choose to post, the comments we choose to leave. No other person is allowed to impinge upon this right to first-person narration. Right?

This year, at last, athletes began to realize the moral ideal of autonomy that Walt Whitman was fantasizing about when he wrote of the heroic person who "walks at his ease through and out of that custom or precedent or authority that

### **GOING OFF SCRIPT**

RIP, traditional news conference. Athletes, coaches, even owners have had other ideas of late. From cutouts to child cameos, the media ritual has been reborn.



### **PUPPET SHOW**

After Marshawn Lynch's \$100,000 fine, Richard Sherman brought along a cardboard cutout of Doug Baldwin to help him criticize the NFL's many policies.



### THIS IS A FOOTBALL

Typically laconic ("We're on to Cincinnati"), Bill Belichick delivered a lengthy explanation of how he and Tom Brady did nothing wrong in Deflategate.



### **ON WISCONSIN**

Throughout the NCAA tourney, the Badgers turned media events into comedy sessions—cracking jokes and taunting the stenographer with big words.



### SILENT TREATMENT

To prevent himself from talking about the officiating, Mavericks coach Rick Carlisle resorted to placing tape over his mouth.



### BE QUIET, DADDY

Riley Curry became the breakout star of the NBA playoffs, singing, hiding behind curtains, waving to the crowd and asking her dad to stop talking.



### **MR. MONEYBAGS**

In the midst of a worldwide corruption scandal, a comedian jumped in front of the embattled head of FIFA, Sepp Blatter, and showered him with cash.



### COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP



### **Playoff Fan Central**

Friday, January 8 -Sunday, January 10, 2016 **Phoenix Convention Center** North Halls 1-6 Phoenix, AZ

- A three-day fan fest experience over championship weekend that lets fans be a part of the College Football Playoff National Championship experience
- Family friendly fun and entertainment, featuring interactive activities, including youth sports clinics and celebrity appearances
- College Football Playoff National Championship media day Saturday, January 9, 8AM-9AM and 9:30AM-10:30AM: Open to the Ticketed Public!

For tickets, visit:

collegefootballplayoff.com/ playoff-fan-central Military ID), \$5 (Group of 20 or More)



### AT&T Playoff Playlist Live!

Friday, January 8 -Sunday, January 10, 2016 Downtown Phoenix (Block 23) Phoenix. AZ

- Featuring national recording artists: The Band Perry, Walk the Moon, Ciara, John Mellencamp, Moon Taxi, Andy Grammer and David Nail
- Live music streaming digitally on WatchESPN, courtesy of AT&T
- Visit collegefootballplayoff.com for additional information and live stream details

Tickets: FREE EVENT



### **Championship Tailgate at the National Championship Game**

Monday, January 11, 2016 University of Phoenix Stadium Glendale, AZ

- To be announced national recording artist to perform on Capital One **Quicksilver Music Stage**
- Interactive sponsor activations and live ESPN programming
- Food and Beverage

Event is free to all fans with a game ticket

### OFFICIAL SPONSORS













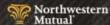












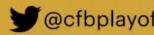


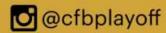


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### IDEAS

suits him not," who "no longer take[s] things at second or third hand ..."

Athletes began to realize this. But there is one above them who mastered this self-determination long ago. One who always had the courage never to submit or yield, to instead hurl defiance at every opportunity. The founder of the "Patriot Way." The veiled lord himself. Belichick.

Before this year of media reformation was out, I resolved to pay homage to its spiritual patriarch in person.

**I SECURED A** press pass to the Patriots' Week 8 matchup, a Thursday night game against the Dolphins. At this point, the Patriots had cruised to a 6–0 record and looked poised to defend last season's Super Bowl title.

Far below the press box, pacing the field, was the man himself. Bill Belichick kept his arms folded and his chin tucked, sphinxlike. I watched him nod in agreement, conferring via headset as to his next turn in this game of human Stratego, yet I never saw his mouth move. With the help of binoculars, I began to fixate on the small gap between his lips, scanning for the fine mesh screen behind which the smaller, truer Belichick looked out on the world, as if in a Mickey Mouse suit.

By refusing to play along with these people in the press box, Belichick has allowed himself to be transformed, by way of their writing and broadcasting, into a humorless curmudgeon. This is a persona, to be sure; a mask that Belichick donned long ago. What he understood was that over time, many of the journalists up here would begin to mistake this mask for the man's actual face. And so, in leading them to believe that he is a reticent grump—and not an unflinching actor in addition to the greatest coach of all time—Belichick has gotten the media to direct their questions to the mask.

And he *loves* it. Former players have said that Belichick spends his mornings walking on a treadmill while reading the day's press clippings, highlighting as he goes. Then, in team meetings, he coaches his players on what questions they are about to field. ("He was about 95 percent

right somehow," one former player says.)
"Weather is not a factor," Belichick tells
them to say. Or, "Last two years mean
nothing." Or, "All that matters is this
week and focusing on this game."

Watch his old news conferences. Watch how he smirks inwardly when he says "That's a great question" to what was obviously not a great question. Watch and be reminded of your own dad, or at least the archetypal American Dad, who also withholds like crazy while treating those around him as if they are cogs in his machinations.

After scoring on their opening drive, the Patriots hung a safety and a field goal on the Dolphins. I was following the action, leaning around the dividers in the high, thick press box windows, when I realized: Actually going to a game is antithetical to the true nature of professional football. I thought of the TV booth, the effects truck, the people all around me. It was their editorials and roundtable jabberfests that harbored, nourished and ever-enlarged my football expectations. They embedded the culturewide imperative to pay attention to this, care about this. Yet the relationship was much more complex than that. Football would never have become America's secular religion without the media, including the likes of the Worldwide Leader. Today it is far and away the highest-rated content across every channel of transmission, yet it wasn't until the advent of broadcasting that the NFL began to be considered something other than a regional curiosity. As the history Brand NFL: Making and Selling America's Favorite Sport makes clear: "The National Football League has never existed in any meaningful way without the media. (Even in its earliest years, without local newspapers NFL games would have been the philosopher's tree falling in the forest that nobody hears, except for a few hundred 'sports' with bets on the outcome.)"

By halftime, the Patriots were leading 19-0, and Belichick's team was executing flawlessly, mechanistically, boringly. Yet there was a kind of hypnotic satisfaction



### NO CALLS FROM KOBE

Well, that got awkward. It was all silence when Roy Hibbert, Louis Williams and Brandon Bass were asked whether Kobe Bryant had called to welcome them to the Lakers.



### **BOR-ING!**

Sure, she beat sister Venus at the U.S. Open, but the last thing Serena Williams wanted to do after the win was talk to the media. Citing fatigue and boredom with the questions, she left the stage.



### TRICK OR TREAT?

Why boxer Tyson Fury dressed up as Batman in England we may never know. But something worked. He took the heavyweight title two months later.



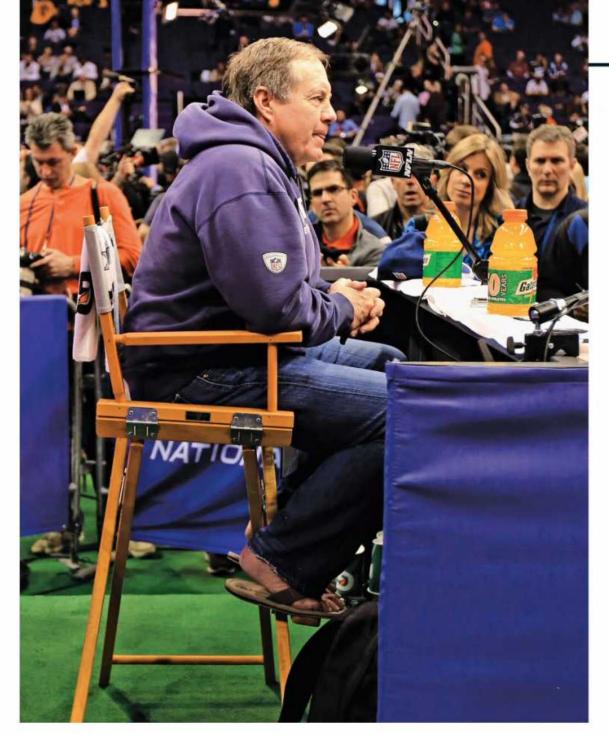
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Belichick, the patriarch of the movement, at Super Bowl media day.

in seeing them dismantle the Dolphins. It was a satisfaction not unlike that of watching a tree get sucked into a wood chipper—witnessing a thing go in one end and emerge from the other completely transformed.

**DEEP UNDER THE** bleachers, in a damp concrete tunnel, the media massed behind a series of black curtains, waiting for the go-ahead to flood into the Patriots' locker room. We chatted amiably for about 45 minutes when, suddenly, we were herded through the curtains in an anxious, vaguely bovine manner.

These millionaires were going to answer our questions with linguistic effluvia—if they deigned to answer them at all.

From one player to the next, the scrum went like this: Unencumbered reporters got closest to the player in his stall, gathering in a semicircle and probing with recorders like hummingbird beaks. Then came the radio people, pushing their mics past the other reporters' shoulders. TV cameramen carried step stools, and these they placed behind the radio people, in order to shoot unobstructed footage. The player in the middle of all this called to mind one of those little birds that hops around in a crocodile's mouth, pecking at this bit or maybe that one, but ultimately getting out of there before the crocodile's jaws snap shut.

Jaundiced in the light of the camera, cornerback Logan Ryan said, "Yeah, uh, turnovers are contagious." Defensive tackle

Alan Branch reified his professional purpose, stating, "I want to stop the run every game, man." Kicker Stephen Gostkowski told us what he thought was nice: "It's nice to be confident, have fun and go out there and feel like you're going to succeed." Defensive end Chandler Jones answered quietly, beads of moisture twinkling against his skin. What did he say? No one around me seemed to know, or care.

Civilians talk about wanting athletes to open up more, be more human. (See, for example, the Tom Brady quote in which he unconsciously delivered on this desire while foiling it at the same time: "I'm a human," he said. "There's no doubt. I'm definitely human.") Yet whenever an athlete dare speak his or her mind-think of the statement issued by Browns receiver Andrew Hawkins in response to police shootings-the ghoulies in the comments section decry, "STICK TO SPORTS!!!!!" Even with message control ceded to teams, players and coaches, sportspeople are still loath to be themselves. There's too much playing time, public opinion and money on the line. The incentive to be innocuous, to promote synergy and not slip up, is insurmountably high.

As such, the baseline unit is the one-person limited liability company, the corporate soul. We are on the receiving end of this: I believe @Recovery\_Water helped prevent me from getting a concussion based on a bad hit! [angel emoji] #NanoBubbles - @DangeRuss-Wilson. Even in the case of the Players' Tribune, Jeter's for-us-by-us Web organ, the voice of each "contributing editor" is so inoffensive and antiseptic, so obviously ghostwritten by an intern named Don, that perusing it makes me wonder what life would be like if I too burned my fingerprints off. Like, what could this possibly even mean, "Diana Taurasi": "My home compass is Spanish-language television, mixed with Argentinian pride, mixed with Italian phrases rolling off the tongue, mixed with milk. I want a lot of everything."

The exception that proved the rule was

88 ESPN 12.21.2015 ROB CARR/GETTY IMAGES



Kobe Bryant's announcing his retirement with a poem on the site. This poem sounded like Kobe, insofar as it made no mention of anything but Kobe and his ambivalent love affair with basketball:

I did everything for YOU Because that's what you do When someone makes you feel as Alive as you've made me feel.

The Lakers printed this ode to monomania on heavy card stock and handed it out to fans, even though this poem is so clearly not for fans, or teammates, or coaches or journalists. The poem is for Kobe and his muse-slash-bane. Reading it, I cannot help but feel ickily implicated, as if I've walked into the wrong hotel conference room and been cheerfully forced to bear witness as an exotic-car salesman renews his vows to a high-class massage therapist.

When people cheer on the death of the news conference, what they're also cheering on, perhaps unwittingly, is a future in which all of us will engage in this kind of careful brand management. In such a future, I'll have my inner circle, the few people I know and care about from real, corporeal life. Then I'll have my fans and followers, the fellow travelers who don't really know me but enjoy or support my curated presence. Then I'll have my "haters," the people

who misinterpret or misconstrue my presented selves, or who actively work against my narrative. These individuals are not with me, physically or in spirit, so they must be against me. This is a feedback-looped orientation toward the wider world that another, better, writer once summed up as: "He who does not feel me is not real to me."

During his media day news conference, Marshawn Lynch put that sentiment this way: "I don't know what image y'all trying to portray of me. But it don't matter what y'all think, what y'all say about me. Because when I go home at night, the same people that I look in the face, my family that I love, ha, that's all that really matter to me. So y'all can go and make up whatever y'all want to make up because I don't say enough for y'all to go and put anything out on me."

This declaration still makes me want to stand up and cheer, sound as it does like something a pioneer in a cabin on the frontier might say. But-and this is ignoring the fact that his trolling flouted an obligation listed in his \$31 million contract— Lynch got at the crux of something capital-T True here. Something that works against the point he was trying to make. Real adult life, the face-to-face relationships that allow one to understand as well as to be understood, is founded upon messiness, dialogue, the abdication of total control. I alone cannot truly know who I am. I alone don't even get final say. I can have some idea. This idea can be based upon the selves I put forward. Yet it's the people whose lives are affected by my selves—they get to tell me what all that self-presentation looks like. They get to measure the distance between the kind of guy I say I am and the kind of guy I happen to be. It is unlikely that Lynch, Jeter and Belichick have any interest in hearing what kind of guys they are. This is understandable. Although they are as in the limelight as anyone in our culture can be, "spelunk the darkest caves of your psyche, in public" is listed

nowhere in their job descriptions.

"STICK TO SPORTS!!!!!" you might be saying about now. Fair enough. I will not mention the recent TV debate in which moderators were demonized for questioning the backstories and assertions of individuals trying to become the leader of the free world. Nor will I mention how the University of Missouri football team used social media to tell the world that it was going on strike until the university's president stepped down. When that president did step down and media came to document the campus' reaction, there was a literal sign of the times staked into the quad-No Media / SAFE SPACE—in addition to an assistant professor of mass media who was filmed saying, "Hey, who wants to help me get this reporter out of here?" This same assistant professor had previously posted on her Facebook page: "Hey folks, students fighting racism on the MU campus want to get their message into the national media. Who among my friends knows someone who would want a scoop on this incredible topic?"

So what's going to happen when each of us is broadcasting "who I am" while simultaneously forbidding or disregarding any scrutiny? What will it mean when we are publishing personal Pravdas, proclaiming that yields of





wellness are up, up, up behind the iron curtain? Let's forget the civic, political or even economic implications of this. (Which, ho-ho, are they manifold.) Just—isn't this lonesome? Liberating, yes. Democratizing, for sure. But emancipating yet isolating? In a fall-of-man-ish way that will cause me to suspect that everything outside my direct control is a potential source of unfreedom?

one-third of the plush leather chairs terraced theater-style in front of the dais in the Patriots' film-slash-news-conference-room. On it, a heavily bubble-jacketed Brady was looking like some precious figurine about to be boxed back up in the attic. He answered questions with a kind of smiling incredulity. "What a playmaker he is," Brady said dreamily, talking about everyone and no one at once.

Belichick slid into the room and stood to the left of the dais, out of frame. There was a small pack of reporters about 5 feet from him, but none approached. He leaned into a corner jutting from the wall's architecture, putting all of his weight onto its right angle. He kept his hands in his pockets and his face fixed, rocking back and forth, toggling his spine against the edge. He watched Brady just as intensely as he does during a game, radiating neither joy nor love but grim determination.

I thought then of all the Kremlinology that people engage in, trying to divine the real Bill Belichick from whatever scraps he leaves. Commenters, both official and unofficial, have looked to his on-field body language and cryptic sound bites for clues. They've dissected pictures of him kissing his girlfriend. They've pored over Vines of him eating "like a gremlin." They've read way too much into the fact that he sang "Love Potion No. 9" at a party. I, myself, read way too much into the answer he gave during the last Super Bowl media day, when the daughter of one of his players asked Belichick what his favorite stuffed

### It is unlikely that Lynch, Jeter and Belichick have any interest in hearing what kind of guys they are. This is understandable.

animal was. "I'd like, uh, like a little puppet," he said, "that you can kinda put your fingers in ... it's a little monkey ... and then he can talk."

Belichick took to the dais. He started delivering a monologue of platitudes, as if trying to get them all out at once. "It was a tough week mentally," he croaked in his strangled-sounding voice. "But they really pushed themselves. I thought our preparation was good and they played hard tonight."

Eventually, a question was asked. Belichick stared into the middle distance. He appeared to be imagining some empty, perspectiveless afterlife in which jaunty supermarket Muzak was overlaid with the tortured screams of this interrogator. Then he snapped to and answered, "It was good team defense, which it always is when you play good."

There were a few more questions about special teams and Dion Lewis. But no one asked the question that I wanted answered, the only question *to* ask, I thought, which was: "Bill, how does it feel to be so controlling? So single-minded? To be heir to—and apotheosis of—Vince Lombardi, George S. Patton and Niccolo Machiavelli? At what cost is this success? How can this possibly be enjoyable, still? Who are you?"

There was a lull in the back-and-forth. Camera shutters clicked together like insect legs. Belichick sucked his lips inward, nodded. A wall-mounted digital clock blinked past midnight. I thought about asking my question. He climbed off the dais and left.

**BEFORE I DEPARTED** the stadium, I spotted big, beautiful, inordinately dumb-seeming Rob Gronkowski. I watched him make his way to the NFL Network set. Nothing especially illuminating happened there—until Gronk declared his deep need to smash the many pumpkins and gourds arranged on set. He had to be told, again and again, that the pumpkins and gourds were, in fact, fake.

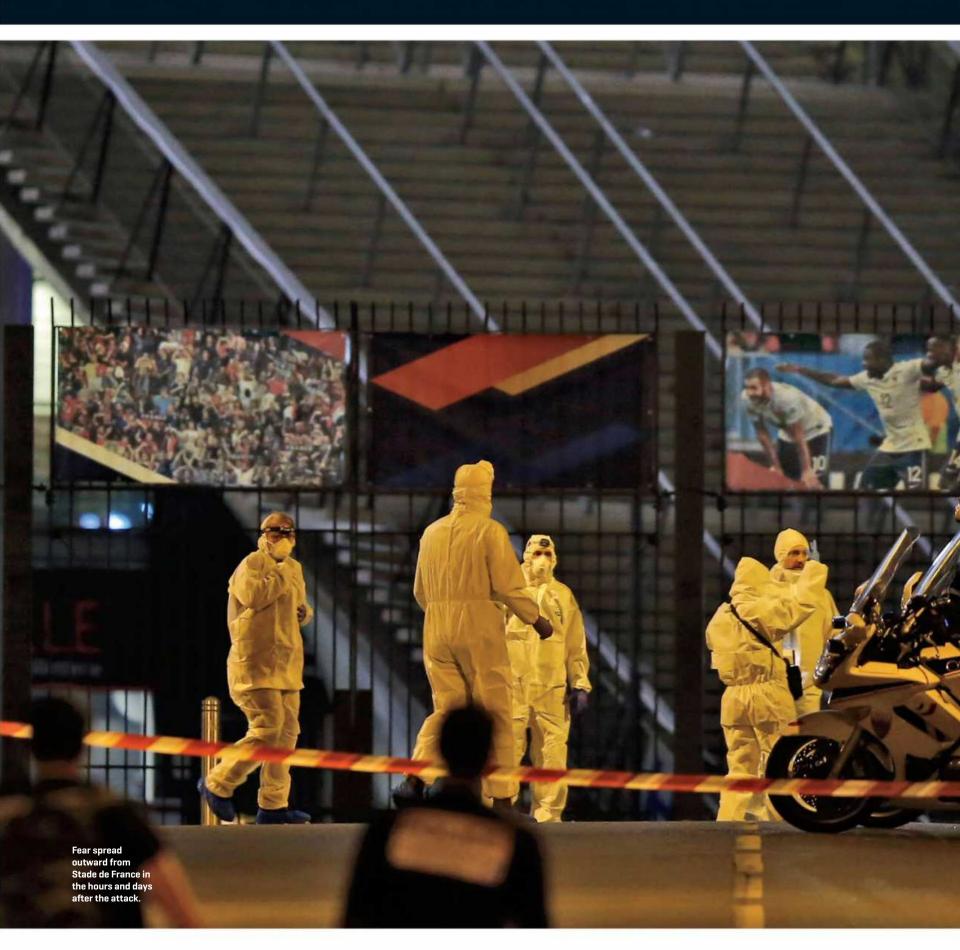
I loved it. I love Gronk. I think I do, at least. But was he really this childlike and guileless? Was this really a joyous burst of realness from the freckle-faced mischief maker trapped deep in that archangelic body? Or was this all just another performance, one carefully calibrated so that gourd-spiking would look like a spontaneous burst of unmediated character but was actually as real as an institutional "leak"?

The tools allowing for PR tactics and airtight message control are available to all of us sole proprietors now. Yet legal definitions be damned, a person is not a corporation is not a person. Real humanity has always pointed toward something or someone outside of the individual. And the truest, most irreducible quality belonging to such a human being might well be a quality that that human being doesn't recognize about himself, or otherwise withholds. It might be something that another person needs to notice, and call his attention to.

Gronk is a transcendent athlete and an ostensibly fascinating dude. This evening, I witnessed him running routes as if possessing a third eye above the field, an eye that grants him the same all-encompassing perspective we fans are privileged with. Gronk probably cannot articulate what it's like, living with this gift. Probably because he has spent his entire life honing it, bridling it, sacrificing most everything else at the expense of it. Who's to say?

Maybe one of us could help him try.









## THE FEAR IS ONE WEEK AFTER TERROR SHOOK THE CITY

BY WRIGHT THOMPSON

ADVISORY: THIS STORY CONTAINS EXPLICIT LANGUAGE

**FIVE DAYS LATER,** France started to bury its dead. The friends and family of Manuel Dias gathered in a small church an hour and a half from the Stade de France's Gate D, where he died.

Manu loved football and working, so much that about seven months after he retired he went back to driving buses and limo vans. His wife wanted him to quit completely and spend more time with her. Now she sat in the front row, in a hard pew in the town of Cormontreuil, where they'd built a life, surrounded but alone. The mourners looked down at the ancient stone floor, or up at the dark wood ceiling, as her cries filled the room.

"Why did they kill him?" she screamed. The priest apologized for the lack of a body. It was "not showable," he said gently, still being held as evidence by police. A portrait stood in place of a coffin. The mourners walked forward to light candles.

His son stood up to speak, wanting his father to have the last gift a boy can give. Manu Dias left Portugal at 18, a refugee fleeing a dictator, promising himself that "he'd give his kids the education he couldn't receive," his son said. He became a professional driver, discreet and invisible when working. So ingrained were his habits he remained silent even when taking his family to the airport. Manu really never said much at all, but when his son would pack after visiting his family, he'd always find that his father had shined his shoes. If he could have one more conversation, he told the church, he'd say, "I am proud to be his son, and I will try to shave more often, and I will try to put on a suit for job interviews."

The mayor announced from the pulpit that Manu's name would be added to the town's war memorial, honoring those citizens who died in battle, in trenches and in French cities held by Germans, and in places like Algiers, Kasserine and Dien Bien Phu. Dias, the mayor said, would be listed as a casualty of terrorism, the first victim of the attack on Paris. The

crowd silently left the church. They tried to remember the 63-year-old man in the photo by the altar, with oval-shaped glasses and his hair trimmed neat, not whatever vapor and viscera remained. Death by suicide bomber is violent and ugly up close. Organs turn to mist. Vertebrae land across the street. A human being, with all his hopes and dreams, turns into a butcher's trimmings. There's nothing left for goodbye.

The sun came out over the little square outside the church, and the mourners mingled, talking about how Manu never really liked to mingle, and trying to understand how three terrorists attacked a stadium of nearly 80,000 fans and only their friend died.

Nobody lingering in the plaza said what they knew deep inside: He died because he needed a boost of caffeine and chose a café across from Gate D instead of one of the dozen other bars and restaurants on the east side of the stadium. Maybe he liked the glow of the light or the feel of the chairs. The whys didn't matter anymore, just the what. Five days ago, they woke up as citizens of one world and today they left this church as citizens of another, a world where they might die because they want a coffee, which is to say, they might die anytime, anywhere, for no reason at all.

**ALTHOUGH THERE HAVE** been political acts of violence at stadiums, this is the first time terrorists have attacked the gates of one during a game. All these years, it's been a worst-case scenario. Stadiums are soft, rich targets. A minor league baseball game seats as many American casualties as the entire Normandy invasion, and a small basketball arena holds all the Marines killed on Iwo Jima. The biggest football stadiums hold two Gettysburgs. Thousands of people sit side by side, riding public trains and eating in nearby restaurants, on Avenue Jules Rimet in Paris or River Avenue in the Bronx, with no way for authorities to make them secure. The only thing between a pleasant day and Mad Max is a social contract and faith in each other's humanity. Live sports work because people believe they are safe, and in Paris, that belief came under attack.

The first bomber blew himself up at Gate D, killing himself and Dias, the first of the nearly 130 civilians to die. Police found a fake Syrian passport nearby and are still working to identify the terrorist. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, a security guard stopped the man from entering the stadium, finding the explosives during a routine frisk. The terrorist arrived with the game already underway. If the bomb had exploded an hour earlier, the area would have been packed shoulder to shoulder with fans arriving to get inside. An hour and a half later, the area would have been filled with the same people leaving. On Monday at a café next to the place where Dias died, the woman at the cash register described the attack. "It doesn't make sense," she said. "It was blind luck it was next door and not here."

The second bomber detonated himself at Gate H about 10 minutes later, injuring several stadium guards but killing only himself. His name was believed to be Bilal Hadfi; he was a 20-year-old French citizen who lived in a housing project north of Brussels before leaving to join ISIS in Syria. Two days later, after police and intelligence agents had swept the scene, an American from St. Louis named Aaron Davis was walking around the stadium. He works in VIP travel for the band U2 and had stayed



Public vigils, like this memorial in Toulouse, arose across France. But in Saint-Denis, the site of the stadium attack and police raids, martial vigilance prevailed.

in town after the group canceled its scheduled show. The area felt a lot like Busch Stadium in his hometown, or any sports-entertainment complex. He arrived before the cleanup crew, taking pictures of blood and jagged chunks of human flesh in the street. Then something caught his eye. He bent down to take a closer look.

It was a piece of a Syrian passport cover, which somehow the crime scene units had missed. Nobody knows for sure, but it either belonged to Hadfi or a third stadium attacker, which would mean a second terrorist had traveled to France on a Syrian passport. Davis turned the evidence in to the police and sat with intelligence officers for hours as they questioned him. On Monday he stood at a memorial with a Sharpie marker, writing a message of support on a wall. Nothing seemed real. The world was coming apart, or at least it felt like it that week in Paris, when a guy in a rock 'n' roll road crew found evidence that the combined investigative might of France somehow missed.

Across the city over three hours, the terrorists attacked a stadium, bars and a Cambodian restaurant in the hip 10th and 11th arrondissements, and a music club—clinically targeting sports, youth and rock 'n' roll. But more than that, they attacked the very idea of Paris, of every city really, of community and civilization, the fragile trust that allows people to walk the

street with strangers. This is what Paris defended after the gunfire stopped. The president announced a memorial at the military chapel where Napoleon is buried, and where the bodies of French soldiers killed in action lie in state. Everyone was a combatant now, he seemed to be saying, and old soldiers will tell you the hardest part of a battle comes after you get home. Once you've been in combat, many veterans find, part of you is always at war.

THE DAYS BETWEEN the attacks and the first funeral passed like laughter at a wake. Paris would stand up to this existential threat against itself. Across from the stadium, someone left a handwritten note: "You want my France, my freedom, my humanity. I'm not even scared." The magazine Charlie Hebdo, itself the target of Muslim extremists 10 months ago, published on time, with the headline: "They have guns. Fuck them. We have champagne." Paris stopped for a moment of silence at noon on Monday, drivers getting out of their cars on the Champs-Elysees, groups of people gathering outside stores, seeming defiant and unified. People boarded up the shattered windows across from the soccer stadium and put flowers into bullet holes left in windows and walls. In the neighborhood where the shootings took place, sort of the Brooklyn of the city, a street artist





painted five men staring into the world, one holding up a glass of wine, another flipping the bird. They leaned at swaggering angles, chins up. Above their heads, the artist wrote: "Paris is still standing."

At night, the bravado seemed to falter, as people moved like pilgrims through a wounded city. A woman pushed her bicycle down the sidewalk with flowers tied to the basket, where a baguette would usually go. The sun began to go down Monday night, and people left their offices and homes and went to pay their respects. At the places in central Paris where the terrorists attacked, memorials of letters, flowers and flickering candles sprang up. People gasped when they first rounded a corner and found one of these shrines, the candles glowing, with hundreds of people side by side. An elementary school student left a drawing: "I'm very sad and mad." The huge mounds of flowers looked exactly like the dirt piled on a freshly covered grave.

Soldiers and cops stood watch. Nobody spoke, the only sound the click of lighters. The emotion of it all overwhelmed people, and they wept silently. The shame of relief passed through the crowds. At the intersection of the first shooting, across the street from the Cambodian restaurant, a pizza place was unharmed. It had been crowded too. Those who chose Cambodian food died and those who

chose pizza lived. The bullet holes left in the walls showed military precision: tight groupings, in three- and four-shot bursts. These were soldiers picking off targets, not wildly spraying the crowd. The spirits of the dead were there with the mourners, in the purgatory of other people's anger and confusion. A young man silently moved through the crowd handing out votives. Even when the windows are fixed and the cafés reopened, these street corners won't feel psychically clean for years. Photographs of the dead stared out from the flowers. They looked young and cocky and safe. Outside one of the crime scenes, a single bistro chair sat with a sign that said, simply, "Why?"

Many of the signs insisted that France would not turn on itself, that the bonds of civilization would survive this assault. Citizens had cause to worry, though; the last time the nation faced something like this terrorist attack, it nearly destroyed itself. During World War II, the Nazi secret police sent fewer than a thousand agents to manage a country of 40 million. They didn't need any more because the French did a fine job of policing themselves, sending at least 3 million letters during the war, informing on people supporting the freedom of France. Up to 10 percent of citizens aided the Resistance while 10 percent actively helped the Nazis hunt and kill their

fellow citizens. The silent 80 percent did neither, cowering, doing whatever it took to keep itself safe. History says that everyone standing between citizens and their protective self-interest had reason to be afraid.

Standing by the Cambodian restaurant, a woman with a small can of black paint wrote on a wall in Arabic: "I wish a smile and joy and hope will replace hatred and ignorance."

Another sign said, "We won't change our way of life." Someone wrote: "I am France. I am Paris. I am Muslim. But I am not ISIS."

Parisians were scared of dying but also of the fear itself, of the corrosive yet seductive power of it, of somehow being changed. As the mourners stood in the candlelight glow, French warplanes dropped bombs in Raqqa and French police kicked in doors in Paris. On a Monday night in a nervous city, its most important civic institutions under siege, those notes seemed less like a plea to save something and more like a eulogy for something that was already dead. Only passing days would tell for sure.

### **THE SURVIVORS DID** the math.

A group of three Americans studying abroad, one from Middlebury, one from Bates College and one from Chapel Hill, lived because they passed through Gate D at 9:07.

The attack began 13 minutes later.

Liz Eason, Emilia Calderon and Vanessa Manjarrez had all painted French flags on their faces. Eason, who grew up in North Carolina and stayed close to home for college, had met her two friends at the stadium. She'd rushed from her music history class; in addition to school, she's a concert violinist. Calderon, a student from Bates with a strong fashion sense, had ridden with Manjarrez, a hilarious former queen of the Rose Bowl parade. The three women found their spot in the third row a short time after 9:07.

They heard the first bomb and saw the security personnel

looking confused, then heard the second explosion and saw police running around. Calderon thought they looked scared and she started to panic. She grew up in Colombia, during a time when the threat of violence followed them everywhere, so those old memories came back. Her friends tried to calm her down. Their phones didn't really work, but Calderon got a message from their program's associate director: "There has just been a shooting in Paris."

"We are at the stadium," she wrote back. "Please tell us what to do."

"Get out right now," the director wrote.

They couldn't. Stadium security wouldn't let anyone leave. Many people, including the players, didn't know what was happening around them. Eason managed to get a short text to her mom. She told her friends she felt safer in the stadium. The game ended, and they made it outside, only to see the crowd in front of them turn and begin sprinting back toward the safety of Stade de France. They thought a gunman was about to shoot them all. They held hands. Inside and safe minutes later, they went down onto the field and waited until police cleared the stadium. Nobody ever told them what spooked the crowd into running.

Once outside, they walked through a rough neighborhood to find an open metro station. None of them felt safe: How to put this? They were three very pretty college students on foot in the Neuf-Trois, the postal code of the northern suburbs and a place tourists didn't want to be at night. Manjarrez made a joke about the indignity of getting catcalled while escaping terrorists. Calderon's father called every 15 minutes. Eason's dad answered the phone in North Carolina, and she will never forget how calm he remained. Whatever deep worries Steve Eason felt, he kept them hidden inside. "Elizabeth, are you OK?" he asked. Liz is a college junior, a Tar Heel and a violinist, a confident, smart young woman who helped keep her friends low-key. Elizabeth will always be his little girl. Finally the students got home and stayed up all night, answering messages and really starting to think about what had happened, and what had not, and the tiny space between those two things. They thought a lot about the 13 minutes.

"This past weekend was probably the worst for all of us," Eason says, sitting at a bagel shop near their school, "because we started learning how bad it really was."

"The suicide bomber had a ticket and was trying to get into the stadium from the same gate," Manjarrez says. "If we'd have been 10 minutes later ..."

Eason's parents told her she could come home but urged her to stay for another month until her semester ends.

"My parents said, 'Emotionally, you need to see that you can recover from this,'" she says. "'That you can walk around in the city without having that fear.'"

**ALEXANDRA COSSON, 28,** arrived at the Stade de France seven hours before the attacks, her first time working security at the venue. She found the office and got her jacket and walkietalkie, and maybe 10 minutes later she stood with another guard at her assigned location: Gate H. Around 6, they started frisking everyone coming in. Her colleague searched the men and she searched the women.

She lights a Fortuna cigarette as she tells the story. It's Monday, less than three days later, and she's back home in her garage apartment behind her grandmother's house. The owner of the stadium security company called her to offer psychological help with the trauma of her experience.

"I refused," she says. "I think I'm fine."
Her day job is running a K-9 unit for
the RATP Metro security. The stadium
gigs are just for extra money, and she'd
never worked at Stade de France before.
Her room is filled with pictures of dogs
and samurai swords, and she has a broad,
colorful tattoo peeking out from her collar
and black fingernails. She's full of bravado
now and says the terrorists who targeted
the stadium were stupid and inept.

"I don't understand," she says. "It was empty. There was no one. It's a failed attack."

She gives a dramatic thumbs-down and smirks.

"Lame," she says.

She and her colleague heard the first explosion but thought someone had set off fireworks. The radio clipped to her chest stayed quiet. Nobody said anything. A woman from a nearby gate came to her, freaking out over the noise, asking, "Did you hear? What was that sound?"

The woman tightly gripped Cosson's arm. Ten minutes later, the second bomb went off. She saw it. A white ball of light in the street, followed by what felt like a tiny puff of wind on her face, and then a rolling cloud of smoke. Her hearing went out, the only noise a high-pitched whistling. The woman never let go of her arm. Cosson's hearing returned a few seconds later. This time the radio exploded in cross chatter and noise. Someone said: "Gather everyone inside Stade de France."

Everything came in flashes after that, snapshots. She remembers injured guards at Gate J next to her. She ran up a ramp to an upper concourse, pulling the panicked woman with her. Colleagues field-dragged a wounded guard to the concourse too, leaving a trail of blood. She remembers faces mostly. A crying teenage girl, maybe 16, with straight blond hair and round eyes. A girl on the

steps hugging her father. A guard trying to call her family but shaking so hard that Cosson had to dial the number. The ghost-white face of the security company boss when she turned in her radio and jacket after everything ended, leaving by herself from Gate U, looking over her shoulder, terrified to take the train. The rail platform was packed and silent.

"I was very afraid," she says. "I wanted to see my family."

The next day, she went back to work at the RATP. Her radio crackled with reports of abandoned luggage, and she felt panic rising. A homeless man wobbled up to her Sunday night and said he had a bunch of bombs and was going to set them off. She knew he was crazy but couldn't calm herself down. So far she hasn't taken the train to work.

"I will need some time," she says, maybe 20 minutes after she called the attack lame and said she was fine, probably the only person in her life who doesn't see that the attack wasn't lame at all and that she isn't anything close to fine. The rail line between her house and work passes the stadium, which she refuses to see, and being around that many people still makes her uncomfortable. She prefers to take a car. On Wednesday, she says, she is going to take the train. Two more days of being scared. That's it. The day after the attack, when she got showered and dressed, she looked at herself in the mirror and felt like she looked different.

"It changes something," she says.

THE BOMBER WHO police believe exploded in a ball of white light in front of Alexandra Cosson lived three and a half hours north of the city in a Brussels suburb. Bilal Hadfi stayed with his single mother, Fatima, on Avenue de Versailles, which starts as a wealthy avenue, with big stand-alone houses guarded by manicured shrubs, turns to middle-class row houses with sensible cars parked out front and then, suddenly, is bracketed by eight-story brick projects. On a wall someone spray-painted, in French, "Fuck the police."

Bilal smoked and drank, a teenager with a whisper of facial hair, until late last year. Everything he'd tried—from working





on electronics to becoming a driver-had ended in failure. He stopped drinking and listening to secular music and, in class, aggressively defended the January attacks on Charlie Hebdo, saying the cartoonists deserved to die for disrespecting Muslims. His teacher didn't understand the sudden anger. The following month, he joined ISIS in Syria.

There's nothing for young people to do around his apartment block, the nearest café or restaurant two stops away on the No. 53 bus line. There's a corner store that makes sandwiches and caters to the diverse people living nearby, selling tubes of harissa paste, bottles of African palm oil, Bosnian cevapi, egg rolls, chili sauce and ketchup.

The man behind the counter wanted no part of questions.

"No," he says.

"What's up?" he's asked.

"No," he says.

Residents eyed any strangers wandering the courtyards between buildings, not

Paris teemed with photos of Abdelhamid Abaaoud, the alleged planner of the attacks. even as residents spread a message of amour.

wanting to talk about their suddenly famous former neighbor. They don't understand it, or much of anything about a normal kid becoming a mass murderer, except that they can feel how different people look at them now. Two in a row say "This is not Molenbeek," the Brussels neighborhood known as the world's hotbed of burgeoning Islamic extremism.

These are not mysterious others who killed 130 people. They are from the same corner of Europe. One of the Paris attackers worked as a baker, and another reportedly once risked his life to save five children from a burning building. They cheer for the same teams and went to the same schools and walked the same streets. Many grew up in Belgium or

France, at least one in the Neuf-Trois, home to a huge community of Muslim immigrants. They are the children of shop owners and middle-class strivers. Many were well-educated Their families were not religious extremists. Their mothers did not wear headscarves. Bataclan shooter Samy Amimour lived near Alexandra Cosson. In the days after the attacks, Cosson has wondered if she ever rode the same train or ordered coffee in the same café.

"I wonder if I could have passed him and not even seen him,"

Amimour lived in a middle-class horseshoe apartment building looking down on a quiet park, in the Neuf-Trois but not in one of the housing projects called cités. His father, Azzedine, sells clothes in nearby Saint-Denis. In June 2014, according to Le Monde, he decided to go to Syria and take his son back from ISIS. When the old man, 67 and tired from the trip, reached the Turkish-Syrian border, he called his son, who grew suspicious but nonetheless gave his dad instructions on how to find smugglers to bring him across the border. Azzedine Amimour crossed a minefield and a desert. After a long journey, he finally saw a black flag. He'd entered ISIS territory. The first checkpoint was manned by a soldier with an assault rifle. He found a cybercafé to contact his son, where the ISIS police in a black four-wheel drive detained him, asking why he was not praying, driving him to a mosque. The next day, he met his son. ISIS did not allow them to speak alone, and the meeting was cold and strange. That night, Azzedine gave his son a letter from his mom, sneaking in 100 euros. Samy gave the money back. It took Azzedine two days to get back to Turkey, where he flew home, understanding he'd lost his son forever. He went back to work, heartbroken.

Their apartment sits back in a complex intersection of streets, off a main road named after the Frenchman who governed one of the first colonies in Africa, setting in motion events that would eventually lead to millions of Muslims living in a country that didn't really want them there at all. At 1 Place Marcel Paul, two floors below the Amimour family, a woman named Marie leaned out of her window. She wore a red sweater against the chill. The sounds of children playing floated in the air.

"You have to understand," she says. "This is a normal neighborhood. There are normal people living here. I don't want to read that it's another Neuf-Trois thing. Look around. You don't see people with big beards and scarves. The family are normal people."

A white-haired woman arrives at the door.

Jaida Nemiche works here, taking care of the elderly. "It can come from everywhere," she says. "There is no place to hide. We're not safe anywhere."

She works in the same building where one of the attackers grew up, and her two nephews had tickets to the show at the Bataclan.

One of them got the flu, so they stayed home.

FRANCE HAD A soccer match scheduled against England on Tuesday, in Wembley Stadium, and after many conflicting rumors, officials decided the game would be played. Nobody really knew how the city would react. Would people gather to watch as a political act of defiance? Would this be the release on the pressure building since Friday night? Everyone would have to decide for themselves. The three American college students who'd been in the stadium didn't feel safe enough to go out, so they watched at home. Many people felt the same way. In the neighborhood attacked on Friday night, where the streets normally buzz with revelers wandering from café to café, most streets were quiet, even for a Tuesday night.

The people who did go out ignored the elephant. In one corner bar, three guys walked in just before kickoff and asked the bartender to turn up the volume so they could hear the national anthem. It began, and they looked up at the television, nonchalant and cool, not singing along. The rest of the bar didn't even break their conversations. Such a typically French reaction was pleasing, and a French journalist looked around and grinned, happy to see something so normal. Jazz played beneath the bar chatter, and the woman at the counter sold cigarettes. A German walked in and found out that a terrorist threat had forced the cancellation of her national team's game that night, along with the Belgium-Spain game.

"It's fucking sad," she said, disappearing back into the night. A kebab shop on a popular bar-hopping street had five customers. Normally around 10:30 p.m. it would be packed with hungry drunks. The staff looked around at the empty seats. Cabbies circled, looking for fares in a city where finding a taxi at night is often impossible. Laurore Bernabe grew up in Haiti but moved to Paris 35 years ago. He'd been driving all night.

"The streets are empty," he says. "It's fear."

In the past two days alone, a man who looked Middle Eastern had been removed from a Spirit Airlines flight for watching the news on his phone. Two Paris-bound Air France flights had been diverted. A suspicious bag had caused the main terminal at Copenhagen's busy airport to be evacuated. The French government gave the president sweeping emergency powers for three months, most of them last used during the war against their revolting Algerian colonists that created the rupture in French society now being exploited by ISIS. Habeas corpus is basically being suspended, the prefect of Paris issued and then extended a ban on protests, and the government wants the power to close mosques it deems radical and bar binationals of their French citizenship if they've been convicted of an attack against the state. After the Charlie Hebdo attacks in January, thousands of people took to the streets to march. This time, something felt different. They didn't want to defy the terrorists as much as not be killed by them.

The next morning, around 4:30, the police raided an apartment in Saint-Denis, less than a mile from the stadium. It turned into a gun battle, with more than 5,000 rounds of ammunition fired by the cops alone. So many explosives went in and out of a small building on a narrow side street named Rue du Corbillon that an entire floor simply collapsed. Terrified residents described a war zone of smoke and cordite. The dead inside, police said, had been planning another attack.

For hours in Saint-Denis, police kept residents and reporters

## "It can come from everywhere. There is no place to hide. We're not safe anywhere."

JAIDA NEMICHE, AN OFFICE WORKER IN THE NEUF-TROIS

behind barricades during a showdown with at least one shooter. They continued to exchange gunfire. Deuce-and-a-half military trucks rolled into the suburb, parking near the medieval town square. Troops and SWAT team cops finally killed or arrested everyone and started sorting through the carnage, ultimately identifying Abdelhamid Abaaoud, believed to have planned the Paris attack.

Outside, the mood was tense and the people of Saint-Denis seemed as scared of the police as the police were of them. The whole thing is a terrible cycle, with everyone's suspicion understandable and yet toxic at the same time. Plainclothes cops questioned two teenagers in a blue hatchback: DWM, Driving While Muslim. One cop wore Nikes and carried a submachine gun. Another held the young men's documents. Nobody smiled. One kid wore gray sweats, and the other had a Bayern Munich Champions League tracksuit. Both had footballer haircuts. One looked terrified, the other defiant. The police let them go. A passerby yelled at the cops in French about brutality. Around the corner, on the main shopping street, residents waited to go home. One stood quietly and held a children's biography of Charles de Gaulle under his arm. A woman argued with a reporter, screaming and starting to cry as other residents comforted her and tried to lead her away.

"It's François Hollande's fault," one of the men says.

The woman's voice grows loud and agitated.

"When he pretends to cry when they are dead people," she says, "why doesn't he cry for Syria? When you see kids and they're dead, killed by poison gas, they don't do anything."

Someone tries to shut her up.
"No," another man says, "let her speak."
She's weeping now.

"When you see a 3-year-old that's dead and you don't do anything," she says, "when you see that and now they come to Saint-Denis, it's too much. Our kids are Muslim, and they are the best."

She walks away, and behind her the crowd of locals begins to applaud.

"Bravo!" a man shouts.

**THE THREE AMERICAN** college students who entered Gate D at 9:07 find an outdoor table near their school. All had signed a language pledge, promising to speak only French inside the quiet college building, so they went out to talk in English. It is Wednesday, and a few miles away, police are raiding the apartment in Saint-Denis.

A siren goes off, the shrill Euro claxon. Emilia Calderon and Vanessa Manjarrez flinch.

All three laugh at themselves.

"Every time I hear an ambulance or police," Calderon says, "I freeze and my heart stops and I think of what happened."

"We did get really lucky," Manjarrez says.

Each of them has processed this differently—they've had conversations about how the stress revealed such essential parts of their personalities—and they're healing at different speeds.

"We're getting there," Eason says.

"We're working on it," Manjarrez says.
"It's an every-day thing."

"For me," Eason says, "I feel fine taking the Metro."



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The attack on the French values of liberty, equality and brotherhood was felt worldwide, here at a match at Wembley Stadium.

"I don't," Calderon says.

After the attacks, their walk to the metro station took them through some rough parts of Saint-Denis and now they wonder how close they came to the terrorists' hideout. They sense the danger everywhere, even in this shaded warren of boutique streets in the La Madeleine neighborhood, where the Italian restaurants make the streets smell like sage and butter.

"We probably passed their apartment," Calderon says. "Stop," Manjarrez says.

"I thought about it this morning," Calderon says. "There's been a lot this morning."

"How do you live with the fear?" Eason asks, showing a crack in the stoic facade she's shown her friends in the past few days.

"I can't tell what your situation is," Calderon says.

"I'm fine now," Eason insists. "I'm so fine. I feel fine."

"I've had a few breakdowns," Calderon says. "Last night I had a breakdown. Bawling my eyes out."  $\,$ 

She looks across the lime green table at Eason.  $\,$ 

"I didn't tell you," she says.

Calderon and Manjarrez had plans to visit Barcelona in a few days—they were going with boyfriends, and since Eason is single, she turned down an invite, not wanting to fifthwheel it—and after the attacks, they decided to keep those plans. One of the boys had talked about going to watch El Clasico—Real Madrid against Barca—on a television at a bar in the city. The combination of football and bars set off something.

"I had a panic attack," Calderon says.

The cancellation of the previous night's Germany match caused them all to panic a little.

"Am I ever gonna feel safe again?" Calderon says. "I hate this feeling of being scared of going out and partying and having fun and smiling. I just had this breakdown that I'm never gonna be OK."

For Eason and Calderon, their time in Paris is almost up. Manjarrez had decided to stay for a full year but now wasn't so sure. Her parents canceled their Christmas trip to France and asked what she'd like to do instead. She didn't hesitate.

"Cancun," she said, smiling, as her friends all laughed.

**ALEXANDRA COSSON WOKE** up Wednesday, saw the police raids near her home on television and decided she would not ride the train to work. She works security for the rail system but doesn't feel safe on a train.

The drive in a car takes twice as long, but she doesn't care. Her boss at the security company did tell her she could call a psychologist at any time if she wanted to talk. Right now, she's talking mostly to her grandmother, Jacqueline Cosson, who's 83 and irreverent. The night of the attack, when Alexandra finally navigated the security and crowds and arrived at home, she found her grandmother standing outside waiting on her. Almost at attention.

"Like a soldier," Alexandra says. They talked until 1:30 or 2 a.m., and Jacqueline described exactly what a bomb

sounded like in the moments after an explosion, the whistle and mental strobing, the way the ground shakes and everything slows down.

"You never forget the sound," Jacqueline says. "It stays."

Alexandra was stunned.

"She told me everything I felt," Alexandra would say later.

Jacqueline remembers the last war in

France, the German planes droning overhead, and hiding with her family from the falling bombs. She told her granddaughter about taking shelter beneath a bridge and finding a dead woman down there, her hands folded, almost in prayer.

"I was 8," she says. "We were the Syrians. We were fleeing."

They walked out of the city, trying to get away from the false safety of Vichy, wanting to live in a Free France. Her father was a soldier. Along the way, a man protected them, gave them food and gave the children toys. She'll never forget his kindness, and she tries to remember that now. He was German. Not all Germans were bad, she tells her granddaughter, and not all Muslims are terrorists. But she does feel like something long buried is returning. "It's very hard," she says, nodding at her granddaughter on the futon. "What they're going through, it reminds me of when I was 8."

The attack at the Bataclan brought back memories for Jacqueline of the Nazis in the French village of Oradoursur-Glane, just four days after the Normandy landings. The SS locked about 400 women and children in a church and then set the building on fire, burning them alive, shooting the ones who managed to escape.

"It's coming back," she says, and then she makes the motion of a wheel turning with her hands, or perhaps a ball rolling downhill. "It's the same thing. Let's pray it stops."









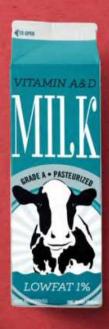
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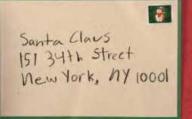














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